



**OREAD MOUNTAINEERING
CLUB**

BULLETIN

Volume 24

Number 2

Spring 1977

EDITORIAL

At last the belated Oread Journal goes to press! I will not bore you with all the technical details, but suffice it to say that the main reason for the non-appearance of the Journal at the Dinner was problems of printing and especially photographic reproduction. The latter problem can only be resolved by using metal plates, which at a cost of £5 each seems prohibitive. Hence you will only find a few photographs which were black and white originals specially printed to give maximum contrast. I still feel that inclusion of such material adds a dimension to the written word and would again put in a plea to all enthusiasts to produce black and white photos for future issues. I am deeply indebted to all those who provided line drawings with their articles and to Colin Hobday for his cartoons.

This year the response to the entreaty for articles has been good and indeed not all those presented have been published. Perhaps the first time the Editor has been able to apply selection! For all those who complained about a lack of material concerning the Skye Meet in '76, this oversight has been corrected in a manner which might be described as going from the sublime to the ridiculous. The Alpine Meet is represented by a collection of individual articles, rather than an appraisal of the total range of activities. This is in part accidental, due to no such resume being forthcoming and in part intensional, as a list of routes climbed can never convey the same feeling as the individual description of experiences.

I would like to thank everyone who has contributed for taking the time and trouble to commit their thoughts to paper and if you find any serious omissions of content then it is up to you to correct this by writing up your exploits.

Finally, I should like to thank Keith who has helped in the preparation of the document by proof reading, supplying drawings and generally for scraping the Editor off the ceiling when she felt at her witts end!

Once again I commend to you the words of Geoffery Winthrop Young,
as an introduction to the following pages of Mountaineering narrative.

There is a region of heart's desire
free for the hand that wills;
land of the shadow and haunted spire,
land of the silvery glacier fire,
land of the cloud and the starry choir,
magical land of hills:
loud with the crying of wind and streams,
throng with the fancies and fears of dreams.

J. GREGSON.

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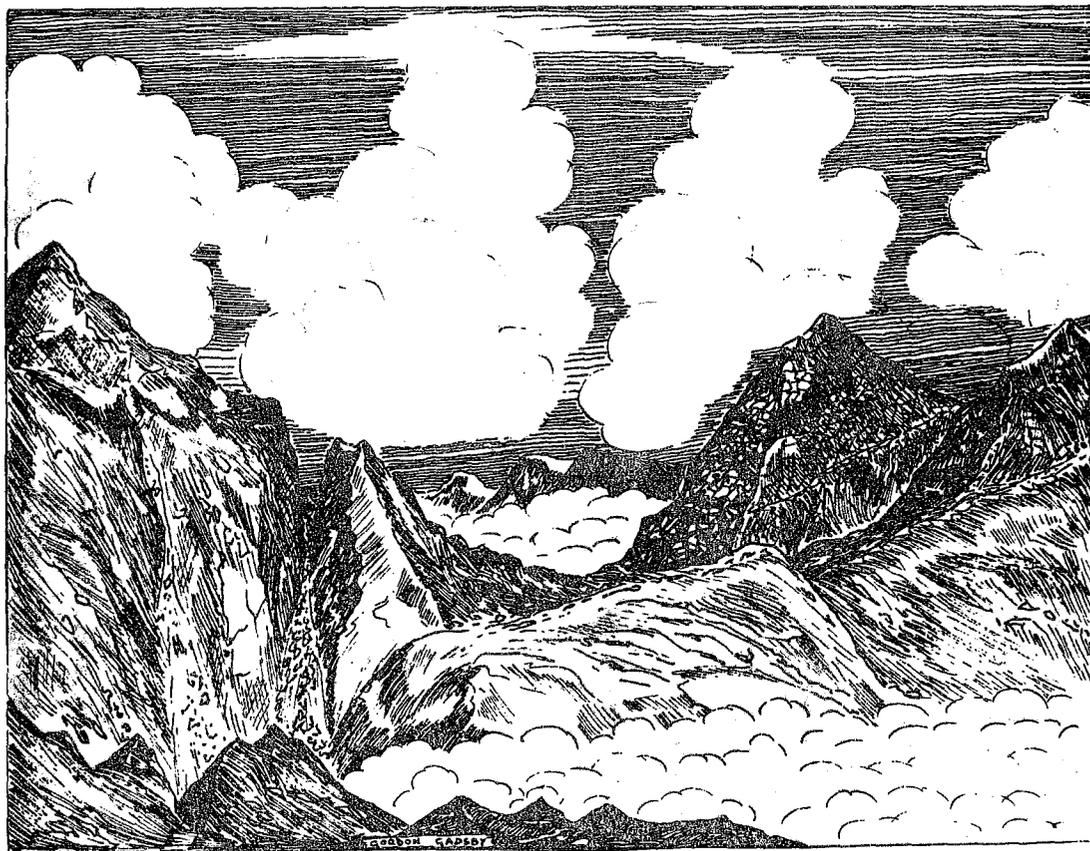
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A SHORT WALK IN THE BLACK CUILLIN

WHITSUN 1976

It was 8.00am. Great clouds were slowly easing from the rough granite summits of the Red Cuillin and sweeping majestically across the wild and beautiful Glen Sligachan. There were six of us in our party - Ken and Chris Bryan, Stuart Bramwell, Colin Hobday, myself and last, but by no means least, 'The old man of the hills himself' John Welbourn. John was in cracking form and the first few miles down the Glen passed very quickly, his non-stop chatter even silencing the cuckoo. The long pull to the ridge crest of Druim Hain gave us several excuses to stop and take in the view. To our left across the Glen, the black massiveness of Blaven was ringed with a delicate white cloud and further left, the pinnacles of Clach Glas appeared and disappeared behind a thin veil of mist. The whole effect was pure magic.

As Colin and Ken reached the crest, Colin turned to us excitedly. "We can see Coruisk - its not far now". Beyond the West shore of the loch, Gars Bheinn, the Southern most Cuillin, was shrugging away the clouds. Its neighbour, Sgurr Dubh, was almost ghostly as a veil of



mist and rain swept between it and the ridge of Druim Nan Ramh. Coruisk, that dark, dread lake, as Sir Walter Scott had called it, was as still as a millpond.

After an easy descent, we skirted the shore and headed for Gars Bheinn, standing almost free of cloud 2934' above the dark green waters of Loch Scavaig. Several miles of rough walking followed and then we began to round the flanks of the mountain and were rewarded with superb views of those magical Hebridean Islands, Eigg, Muck and Rhum. From here the ascent was steep and more or less straight up on very broken ground, until we reached a prominent point where the South Ridge proper began. Ahead the ridge looked sharp and interesting with at least two towers before the final summit.

"What a picture" yelled Ken, capturing on film the Island of Soay spread out like a map below us. "What a flog!" muttered John, still savouring the effort of that long pull up from the shoreline of Loch Scavaig. The rock was slippery and that, coupled with the tremendous drop on the East side of the ridge, kept us all quietly occupied for the next half an hour.

At 5.00pm we reached the large cairn. The view was impressive, the main ridge as far as Bidein Druim nan Ramh was bathed in brilliant sunshine whilst beyond, the clouds were slowly lifting and releasing that finest jewel of the Cuillin, Sgurr nan Gillean and its satellites.

Just then two climbers came up from the Sgurr nan Eag Ridge. They had just completed the traverse of the Dubhs and were on their way back to Coruisk via Gars Bheinn. We wished them good luck and as they carried on one turned and said "There's a loner with three days food supply heading for the 'Gap' - you're certain to catch him up - he'll be in trouble up there". With that warning, they were on their way. We in turn began the easy scramble along the ridge over Sgurr a'Choire Bhig and then the steep ascent to the rest of Sgurr nan Eag. We agreed to rest and I was eating my second Mars bar when I became aware of someone behind me. I knew from past experience that loners on the Main Ridge of the Cuillin can cause one a lot of hinderance and anxiety. "You



must be really keen to attempt the Ridge solo carrying all that gear" I said, turning to the stranger, "Oh, I've had two previous attempts in the other direction and failed both times. Now I've got three days supply of food and just intend to plod on steadily" he replied. "We had better be going" cut in Colin, reducing our proposed fifteen minute break to five. We wished the stranger the best of luck and set off for Sgurr Dubh. Later, I glanced back and the stranger was already engaged in earnest conversation with Welbourn. After the slippery basalt of the ridge it was sheer joy the reach the sun-warmed Gabbro of Sgurr Dubh and climb easily up the steep, broken rocks to the fine summit. Although it was 8.00pm the sun was still high in the

heavens and we could see several people on the very top of Alasdair, the highest peak on Skye. We chatted about where we should bivvy and were all agreed, except John, that whatever happened, we must cross the Tearlach Dubh Gap before dark. This seemed simple enough at the time as the gloaming in June lasts until after 10.00pm.

We headed along the main ridge and soon reached the base of a large tower where we put a rope on. Below us, three climbers prepared to tackle the impressive looking crack on the far side of the Gap. It was eighty feet

high, very steep and the only breach in the wall. Much to our surprise the leader of the party sat down below the fissure and started to put on a pair of P.A's. Welbourn arrived at this moment. "Look at that! P.A's!" he exclaimed; "He's going to climb it in P.A's, I'll never get up there in boots with my gammy leg". Ken bounded up the edge and looked over at the difficulty. His surprised exclamation was unprintable - the crack seen in the half light looked very fierce. "You'll bomb up it, Ken" I said, realising the time had come for some confidence boosting - "boots and all!". Just at that moment, the second man jerked the rope and a heavy sac rolled free from a crevice. Slowly it slithered away, eluding the frantic grasp of the third man and gathering momentum it went bounding down the West gully towards Coir A Ghrunnda. The time was 9.05pm. Almost an hour later the party of three reached the top, the third man very tired after climbing six hundred feet down the gully to retrieve the fallen sac!

To compensate for our wait, we had seen the glory of a broken spectre as the shapely spire of Alasdair had suddenly appeared on the clouds between Gars Bheinn and Sgurr Dubh.

The abseil down the gap was easy, although Stuart had to spend precious time showing the stranger the technique. True to form, Ken was up the crack like a bomb. Unfortunately the rope jammed under a small overhang and this delayed us yet again. It became, to coin Nat Allen's favourite phrase, a 'Backs to the wall job'. The only thing that mattered was to get out of that dark chasm and reach the warmer air above in the hope of finding level ground for a bivvy.

One by one the rest of us reached the top. John, gammy leg and all, went up like a rat up a pump. Tony, a stranger no more, followed with a lot less skill but equally determined not to be left alone in the Gap. Last of all came Stuart. It was turned 11.00pm when he reached us and he couldn't remember seeing a single hold! We then did a torchlight scramble up the Thealach Ridge to the col between Alasdair and Sgurr Thealach and soon the two gaz stoves were humming away heating our precious brew. All around was quiet, not even a breath of wind to disturb the stillness. North Westwards we had a limited view of the neighbouring peaks, An Stac and Sgurr Dearg and behind them the sky still held a rosy glow. Just before midnight, I passed round the tea

laced with a drop of the hard stuff to celebrate me being half way to ninety. What better place for a birthday could there be, than here, halfway to heaven between mountain crest and sea!

The cold light of dawn and the rustle of John's bivvy sac woke me at about 3.20am. Colin and Ken had already got the stoves going. The ensuing tea tasted great, even though it was brewed in last night's unwashed vegetable soup pan. Ten minutes later we were perched around the airy summit of Sgurr Alasdair, 3251 feet, the highest peak in the Hebridean Archipelago. There was a distinct chill in the air although hardly a breath of wind to motivate the eerie mist that enveloped the lower part of the ridges. Above the mist, the dark saw-toothed peaks were clear and stark against a rapidly brightening sky. Beyond them the Trotternish Peninsular, the Old Man of Storr and the deep shadowed clefts of the Quirang showed the magnificent grandeur of Northern Skye.

Seconds later the rim of the sun emerged behind the Scottish mainland and quickly gained height in the Eastern skies. The transformation of the dark forbidding shadows to delectable rosy hued mountains was immediate. The once captive mist, freed by the warmer air, began to rise from the glens. Suddenly, a large thin area of mist welled up from the Coruisk Basin and passed directly between us and the sun. The effect was incredible. We were enveloped in a fantasy world of pink, our clothing, skin, the rock and the sky being saturated with pink light. Around the sun was a giant halo of dazzling colour, like a rainbow, but a complete circle. The phenomenon lasted about half a minute. In 25 years of mountaineering I have seen nothing like it, before or since. What followed was bound to be an anti-climax and so it proved.

The seven of us carried on along the main ridge excited and eager at first, enjoying the climbing and marvellous views in all directions. But slowly an overall feeling of tiredness engulfed us and we lost interest in photography and became desperately thirsty. Walking was no problem but climbing became hazardous and Welbourn's constant complaints about the route, having to climb in a rope of three (with his mate Tony in the middle!) about his knee, etc., etc., instead of being a joke to us began to tell on our nerves. Descending Sgurr na Banachdich, the sight of a burn thousands of feet below made up my mind. To hell with it! I must have water. I suggested that I would go down

at the next opportunity. To my surprise the other five agreed to join me. We waited ten minutes for Tony, and told him our decision. Although looking completely shattered he said he would carry on as he still had ample food and drink for two more days. I hope you made it mate! We left him sitting on a boulder at 10.40am, head bowed between his hands. Within minutes we were zooming down the scree into Corrie of Hares, our tiredness forgotten, at the thought of reaching water. On the way down, we met Radders coming back up! He looked awful. Somehow, the cunning old fox, Ashcroft, had given him the slip and Chris had thought he was still on the main ridge traverse.

We drank and drank endless brews by the burn. Welbourn's chunterings became amusing once more, the sun sparkled now and again from a rapidly clouding sky. The last step of our journey over the gently rising Bealach a'Mhaim to Sligachan was pure joy. The gaunt Black Cuillins beckoned us mockingly but we were well satisfied with our walk and our minds were full of the magnificent sunrise, of the stillness of Coruisk and a hundred other sights we had seen. At about 3.40pm we reached Sligachan Bridge. I thought of the words of Geoffrey Winthrop Young from his poem 'Knight Errantry.....'

'Ye who have climbed to the
great veil
Heard ye the chant? Saw ye
the Grail?'

We certainly had!



'LET'S HAVE A WRECK AND LOITERER ON THE CUILLIN RIDGE'

SKYE MEET WHITSUN 1976

What they really said was "Let's have a RECONOITRE on the Cuillin Ridge". You see my hearing isn't as good as it used to be. This is why my interpretation of the suggestion appealed to me more than the real one!

It was a similar misinterpretation that got me interested in the Ridge in the first place. On the eve of my departure for the Oread Meet in Skye, my colleague at work said "Are you going to watch the Sky programme tonight, John?" I replied in my usual vague way "I don't think so as I don't go much on Patrick Moore". Once it was established that the programme was about the Cuillins and not about stars, I chased away to my TV to watch this bloke and two females leisurely move from one rocky bump to the next without as much as a bead of sweat between them and only the odd grasp and grunt at the appropriate moments, prompted by the producer of the programme. I must admit I was quite impressed, but immediately dismissed the idea of me ever attempting it as I always make sure that I am not fit enough for such strenuous ventures!

I arrived in Glen Brittle, sorted out a couple of Oreads who were already there and for our first day out it was decided to walk to Loch Coruisk and back. We had no sooner started when I noticed that I was being pulled along by a 5 mph slip stream. This was not to last as the party disappeared into the distance. Eventually, I collapsed at the Memorial Hut. Not completely finished, I suggested that we continue up the side of Loch Coruisk and over the ridge, dropping down into Corrie Lagan, but they insisted that we went back the way we had come.....through the swamp! On the way back my companions kept waiting for me when what I really wanted was for them to leave me where I was so I could die in peace. All I can say about the day out in retrospect is that the path should be easier now as it has been middle tarred both ways!

That evening heralded the arrival of a few more Oreads and it was decided, yet again, that a walk along the cliffs would be a good idea. This time to go looking for rare wild flowers. After a days exercise I was feeling a little more human and tried to encourage one or two of them to go with me to Corrie Lagan and if the weather permitted, do a climb. Alas, this was not to be so our bumptious botanists and yours truly started the search for the elusive orchid. After a while, I became rather bored and decided, as it was a nice day, to soak my feet in a stream and look up at the mountains I had travelled 700 miles to climb. When the fancy returned to catch the others up it wasn't long before I found them sitting in an orderly circle. I assumed they were having their lunch and did not pay much attention to Ken Hodge lieing on his stomach with his camera to his eye. I thought this was always how he spent his lunch breaks. The friendly atmosphere soon changed as I strode into the centre of the circle. It's a good job there are no trees around or else I think I would still be hanging there. I had just stepped on the only Skye wild orchid in existence! Anyway, we splinted the poor thing up and left it looking somewhat dejected and bent! After this unfortunate episode, I spent the rest of the day on my own as no one would talk to me. I walked on to the peninsula jutting out into Loch Brittle and soloed one or two routes on the cliffs. The reason I have mentioned this is because on the way off this peninsula I noticed thousands of these rare orchids and you just could not help stepping on the dammed things!

On the following day the weather was a bit off, so we all had a tourist day out to Portree. It was after tea that evening, back at the camp site, when I met that teetering twosome, the happy ashbasher from Ashbourne (nicknamed the Cheerful Chippy for the sake of this article and I am not referring to your rather long ex WD ice axe, Peter!) and his companion, the capable Cable Puller from Kilbourne. (I think it would be in rather bad taste to refer to this gent as a wire puller!). They had just moved to Glen Brittle from the 'Queer-hang out' for the last few days of their holiday, accompanied by their wives.

It turned out to be a beautiful evening and I have never seen the Cuillins look so superb in the sunset. It looked so inviting, even to a man of my physical state, so that when the suggestion was made, I just

said "O.K! I'll come with you". It was not until we were on the ridge proper that they repeated what they had really said into my good ear with a following wind, because this wreck had been loitering with a vengeance!

Grip your seats folks (or someone else's if you are more fortunate), at last I have come to the subject matter behind the title of this article.

It was getting late by the time we had made some hurried arrangements and got off to bed. I had no sooner shut my eyes when I was awakened by the cable puller at about 4.00am. From what I could see out of one eye so early in the day, it looked like it was going to be a beautiful dawn. I was wrestling with my kippers when the Cheerful Chippy arrived on the scene. I nearly died when I saw his rucksack. It looked like a big orange Frankfurter with straps and a flap adorning it. What he had got in it will be revealed later, so read on folks!

We left the camp site about 5.30am, along the Glen Brittle - Coruisk path, and by this time I knew just about every bog and boulder by name. We made good time until we started to climb up Gars Beinn, soon to be renamed by yours truly as 'Gasp in'. I have already remarked about the Chippies sac being rather large and he in turn remarked about mine being rather small (my sac, I'm talking about!). I'm afraid that this was soon to be remedied, because three quarters of the way up 'Gasp in' he presented me with his leaky gallon water bottle, full, to carry. I lightened the load quickly by drinking about a third of the contents by the time I had reached the first summit. As soon as we were on the ridge proper, a thick mist descended upon us and it was a 'gags on job'. In the hurry to get away, I had picked up the first Guide book that came to hand which was the MacInnes edition Vol. 2. For this reason we had to do a Japanese type traverse of the ridge, by starting at the bottom of the page and reading upwards! This edition starts at Scurr na Gilleann and finishes at 'Gasp in'. Once we had got used to standing on our heads reading the guide, we progressed on our way and it didn't seem long before the TD gap was reached.

Although the mist was still with us, it cleared occasionally to give delightful views of Coruisk and to show us we still had a long way to go!

Apart from a wait at the TD gap for others (not guilty this time), the intrepid three made short work of the crack and continued in thick mist and rain to Scurr Alisdair. Still in thick mist, we plodded on and encountered a bit of difficulty around the Mhic Connich area.

We did not think we would get this far, so to avoid wasting any more time we pressed on along Collies ledge. This was an amazing piece of route finding by the Cable Puller. You expect to be teetering above Corrie Lagan and instead its a 'hands in pockets job' and leisurely stroll. By this time the cloud had lifted and the rain had stopped which afforded some terrific views out to the Islands and Corrie Lagan. We could even see each other, which was not so interesting. From what I can remember it was pretty straight forward from there up to Scurr na Banachdich. When we arrived at this point it was about 8.00pm and I thought it would be a good idea to find a bivvy and get some sleep whilst it was still warm. The other two agreed and we found a bit of shelter just below the ridge on some wet moss, overlooking Corrie na Bandadich and Glen Brittle camp site. This is where the contents of the Chippie's rucksack were revealed.

I won't go into every item in detail but there was 2lbs of cheese at least, enough food to last a week, sleeping bag and many other accessories. I must admit that he was more comfortable than the cable puller and myself and he was kind enough to lend me one or two items because I had very little between me and the wet moss. We were just about to bed down when Pete Scott and friend came storming past - in fact nearly straight through our bivvy. He told us that there were so many Oreads attempting the ridge at that time it was like the A6 on a Sunday afternoon, although they were the only club members that we saw. Pete and his mate shot off into the setting sun and I resumed battle with the damp moss. Despite the magnificent sunset and view, I still could not help looking at the tents and thinking that in one there was a sleeping bag, foam mattress, lilo I thought also, looking at my two companions who were a little better equipped than I, this will teach you to carry a light sac in future!

Anyway, we did get some sleep. In fact I was quite warm but woke at 3.00am next morning with every hair on my body frozen and my teeth chattering. The Cable Puller remarked that I looked as if I was sleeping in an oxygen tent and what with the condensation and coughing issuing forth spasmodically, I could have done with one! We breakfasted and jumped up and down until it got light enough to continue on our journey with about two thirds left to do. Another beautiful dawn, photographs taken and we were off like Jewish whatsits to try and get warm.

I will not give a blow by blow account of the rest of our journey. There were times when I thought I would be up there for ever. We followed quite a number of false trails but I think this happens to most people on their first attempt and this section is not used as much as the Corrie Lagan Horseshoe. By this time our war wounds were beginning to play up. The Chippie's knees felt as though they were on fire and mine felt likewise. The Cable Puller was having trouble with an old injury, but never-the-less we pushed on. We had one rather daunting experience when we were passed by two mountain club members who had started that day! Going very fast indeed they were trying to include Blaven and Glen Glas and apparently had been training for it, having done the ridge on numerous occasions.

My main difficulty with this article is concluding it. Yours is probably reading it, but it might come in handy for Club members who are suffering from insomnia. Anyway, finally, if anyone in the Club wants any information regarding the Cuillin ridge, don't ask me! I have forgotten most of the Peak names on the thing already! Mind you, we were very lucky to complete the last two thirds of the ridge in good weather and when we finally staggered into the 'Sligachan Hotel' that evening I don't think I was the only person who was surprised. Of course, you always get the Club knockers (critics, I mean). I must admit that we did miss a few of the highlights on the ridge such as the Alisdair summit, the 'King's Chimney' and the Inaccessible Pinnacle, which incidentally really was because we only had 100 feet of rope between three of us. Infact, that goes for all the climbs including

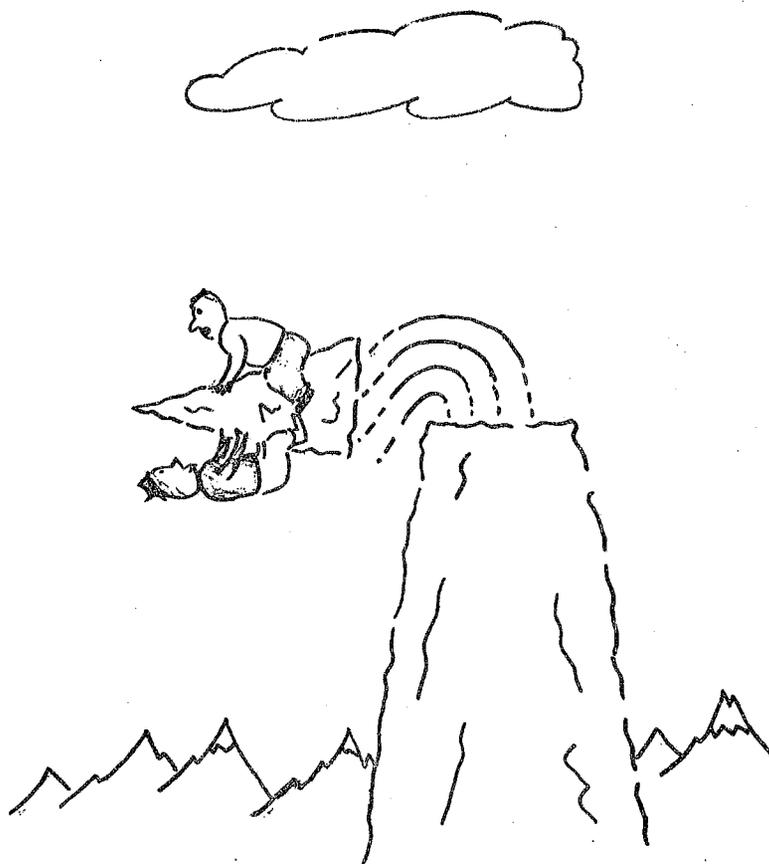
Naithsmith's route and Am Bastier tooth. However, I think it is probably easier to do the climb than it is to walk up loose scree! In fact, it was a good job all three of us could solo v.diff. and above with a heavy sac, especially when you have the added difficulty of route finding. Ask Gordon Wright, he knows what I am talking about (I mean soloing, not route finding).

Absolutely finally, I would like to thank W.D. and H.O. Wills for their support because without them I don't think the expedition would have succeeded. If anyone asks how long it took I tell them about 50 fags long!

'Half a lung, half a lung, half a lung onwards'.

The Embassy Addict from Egham.

J. DOUGHTY



"ANYWAY WE'LL HAVE PROOF THAT
WE REACHED THE SUMMIT"

In torrential rain, one by one the unwitting Oreads who were crazy enough to leave their warm, dry homes for the extremes of the 'Why' valley, overcame the Meet Leader's first deliberate mistake i.e. finding the Pub that he had wrongly named in the circular. (Well, it still sold Andy Dunham's favourite Lager, didn't it?)

All members forsook the oppressive nature of the Christchurch campsite, choosing the solitude of Worcester Lodge. After a damp start on Saturday, a couple of car loads moved off to chance their arms on a very damp Wyndcliffe. A scramble up the 550 steps saw us back on the road to Chepston and quickly entrenched in the Lounge Bar of the 'Royal Hotel'. (This was turning into a P.s.s up). On the stroke of one o'clock, suitably topped up with 'Dutch Courage', we made three ropes up and in improving weather, knocked Wintours Leap dead, with Yorkshire Pudding, Gregson declaring the crag greater than Ilkley Quarry.

Dusk arrived all too soon and a couple of circuits of the campsite track were taken by the 'harriers' as Dovedale Dash training, prior to repairing to the Pub. Here the pace quickened when the new arrival, John Fisher, bought a round. It was rumoured that he had flogged a couple of gold teeth. And so to bed.

Sunday, after two more training spins of the site, we trudged off down the 'Dribblings' to the Seven Sisters, meeting up with all manner of Oread splinter groups. Eventually in the mad rush for a lunch time pint at the 'Saracen's Head', the clapped out Meet Leader garrotted himself on a trip wire and copped for a black eye. Beer and crisps consumed, all hands climbed 'The Pinnacle', followed by an involved carnival short cut through the Forest of Dean, lightened by a Fisher paper on what to do with the youth of today.

And that was that. For those present a good weekend, I think! It was a pity we failed to make contact with Pete Holden's team and Dunham's Stella Artois record still stands.

Those present, Pat and Derek Carnell, Mike Dyer and family, Keith Gregson, John Linney, John Fisher, Pete Holden, Paul Beverley, Howard Lancaster, Les Peel, Pip Hopkinson, Nat Allen.

N. ALLEN



KINDER EDGES

MARCH 26th - 27th 1977

The Friday night saw four Oreads camped at Fieldhead and the customary last hour in the Pub was taken, marred only by the ear-splitting shrieks of a gaggle of giggling girls, obviously overcome by the strong drink (shandy) and the ardent glances of admiring male company (Dave Cheshire). Beryl was not amused.

Saturday dawned noisily. We had pitched under a rookery and we were soon on our way to Upper Tor, where a couple of routes were climbed on what proved to be an excellent Crag. Sadly, freezing fingers forced a move to Seal Edge where it was hoped that Chinese wall would be more amenable. It wasn't. The mist turned to a steady rain and we decided to head straight for Oyster Clough, following the Fairbrook down to the Snake, where our ace-in-the-hole was cashed. This was a half hundred weight sack of Mike Wren's best nutty slack, furtively concealed in the plantation on the Friday night. Taking it in turns to carry the coal looted from the woods, the sorry struggle up Oyster Clough can readily be imagined, with Peter 'Hernia' O'Neil well to the fore until brought to his knees on the last rise muttering about a thumping heart. Was it the coal, or had Beryl finally winked back at him?

With expectations high the cabin grate was cleaned out and a real boy-scout fire laid which took off first time. (Welbourne please note!). Then came disaster. Ignoring the chimney, dense clouds of acrid smoke belched forth and retreat was soon inevitable. Smoke poured from the cabin's every oriface. We huddled outside in the drizzle overcome by the fumes and the awful irony of having rendered uninhabitable the only refuge for miles. About an hour later a compromise was reached whereby the door left wide open allowed the smoke to come down only to waist level. Our meal was prepared, therefore, by squatting down and cooking on the floor beneath a circling pall of smoke and smuts; a triumph of Oread ingenuity! Beryl was not amused.

Feeling a need for fortification against the rigours of the coming night, we set out, in persistent rain, for the Snake Inn and on the moonless moor ran into the Hobday 'B' team, already well under the influence of alcohol. After arriving in Edale, they had immediately succumbed to the lure of a jumble sale at the W.I. where they had idly rummaged away the afternoon until invited for tea and biscuits. This offer was readily accepted for surely two hundred yards in two hours deserves a brew! The arrival of a coach load of invalids had interrupted this pleasant tea party and after running a blockade of wheelchairs, our intrepid team had emerged triumphant, Reg clutching a single egg (after haggling) and Mike a one-cup teapot with stand. Laden with this booty, the jubilant party had set off over Kinder slap into the teeth of a blizzard of such ferocity, they said, that they were driven to seek sanctuary at the first lighted habitation. By an amusing coincidence this happened to be the Snake.

The evening went down as usual, very smoothly, and it was with some trepidation that the return to the cabin was contemplated. All went well though, despite a very mellow Beryl, who, drifting in that heady euphoria induced by a single malt, veered off the straight and narrow into the plantation only to be neatly fielded by the rabbit fence.

Habitues of the Bleaklow cabins will know only too well how these nights of adversity arouse the baser human instincts and this night proved no exception. On these meets you soon get to know your place in the Oread hierarchy! Exercising his Presidential prerogative (Beryl averted her eyes), Colin, resplendent in his apres-ski gear was soon into the optimum position nearest the fireplace and furthest from the door. The rank and file were left to sink to their respective levels, Dave Cheshire in the spilt sugar under the table, and myself as reluctant door stop. An incontinent Mike Wren showed his native cunning by trampling everyone but the President whilst rushing to and from the door. This despicable exhibition of blatant boot licking was rewarded by a number two spot under the President's wing. Beryl, of course, was spoilt for choice.....

Of the night itself, little need be said. Once again we had picked the longest night of the year and once again the only person who appeared to get much sleep was the human metronome, who ticked off the long, cold seconds in his merciless monotone. Can anything be done about this man? An expansion bolt up the nostrils perhaps!

Breakfast was taken amongst the usual squalor, the only space on the table being around Reg's latest acquisition, a thinly disguised molotov cocktail of evil appearance and worse behaviour. Like pets, stoves take after their owners, and this one, after a particularly malevolent tantrum, left even its proud owner ashen-faced and shaking, whilst lesser mortals like Dave and myself dived for the door.

By now, an icy snow-laden blast was howling angrily down the Clough and the decision to retreat was unanimous. Heavily laden with overnight gear plus ropes and rubbers, it was weary work up an interminable Bleakden. At the top, the President made one of his magnanimous gestures for which he is so justly famed. A Toffo for each of us. Such compassion! At last, a wintry Grindsbrook hove into sight and we dropped down the Nab, a smoke grimed team led by the ever immaculate Colin. How does he keep so clean? Edale was reached at twelve noon precisely and we felt sure that we would be the first into the Bar but our hopes were soon dashed. Parked squarely up to the 'Nags' front door was the Gordon Wright drinking team wagon, occupant in full 'Javlin' rig and with the side window wound down to catch the first grating of the sliding door bolt. After the withdrawal of this last great problem, Gordon led superbly up to a stance at the Bar, seconded competently by son David and yet another magnificent mountain day ended.

Although the weather was consistently bad, the weekend proved memorable in many ways and I would like to thank all those who turned out - Peter O'Neil, Dave Cheshire, Colin Hobday, Dave Weston, Reg Squires, Mike Wren and especially Beryl who added a very welcome feminine touch, even managing to wash her hair in the Snake Inn hand basin whilst pretending to powder her nose!

B. WEST

The first thing that comes to mind when recalling the Meet is the journey through Shropshire. I can't remember seeing the hills so clear or so well defined as they were that evening - a good omen? The second is 'the smell'! Someone (just grown a beard, drives a beetle and comes from Stafford) thought it was Rock who in turn thought it was the Doctor. However, or in this case, whoever, we overcame the problem by drinking more beer and smoking more cigars. The culprits turned out to be the Tinkers who had camped down the road and were using the Pub to exchange gossip and fleas!

Next morning, six of us left the hut at 7.00 am to walk the first part of the Dovey Watershed. On the way down from the hut we met David Wright who came all the way for the day. Bev and Kath were seen conducting parental duties in their tent! The walk, I'm glad to say, was most enjoyable. Mind you, the start was an epic akin to jungle warfare. Roger, of course, knew the way but said nowt. Bang on 2.00 pm we met Dave Penlington and his son, who had timed it to perfection from the hut to meet us as they did. We gained the summit of Aran Benllyn at 3.30 pm and enjoyed some magnificent views of Snowdonia. Then over Aran Fawddwy and back to Bryn Hafod for tea. A delightful day in excellent weather and company.

The cragging team surveyed the area and eventually found a route in which the water (which came from a quick downpour and missed the walking party) only splashed from hold to hold, rather than forming a continuous stream. The crux of 'Jack O'Diamonds' turned out to be a bit showery! The Doctor defied death by once more combining routes and provoking the comment ' $\frac{1}{2}$ to us, $1\frac{1}{2}$ to the Crag'.

A splended evening was held at the 'Red Lion Tabernacle', all the old favourites and some new ones were sung. Special thanks must go to the resident conductor for keeping order in the more quiet passages of Cwn Rhondda, and to young Cheshire for smoking in such an entertaining way despite the expense.

Sunday saw a team set off to finish the Dovey Watershed in fine style, whilst the rest of us, once more did battle with the crag and the elements. The weekend was rounded off with much tea back at the hut. Most of us departed at 5.30 pm. I say most of us because the Doctor and his new assistant were still on the crag obviously trying to gain back the other $1\frac{1}{2}$.

Many thanks to those who came and I hope you will join me again next year.

Thanks to:- Bev and Kath Abley, Roland Antony, Paul Beverley,
Colin Barnard, Roger Chapman, Dave Cheshire, Keith Gregson,
'Rock' Hudson, Dave Penlington and his son, Alan and
Reg Squires, Dave and Gordon Wright.

J.H. LINNEY

CEFN GAWR

APRIL 1977

A small hand picked group of Oreads decided to make the pilgrimage to Cefn Gawr on Mignient on Friday April 22nd 1977 to relive some of the delights first introduced to the Oread by Harry Pretty way back in 1965. The group consisted of myself "leader", Chris Bryan apprenticed to John "Bruno" Welbourn, Brian West (Fire Lighter, first class) and Beryl Strike (Bronze Medal Life Saving, Queen Street Baths).

We assembled at the Tan-y-Groes Hotel, 5 miles north of Dolgellu in pouring rain. The only thing to do was to go inside and sink a few pints and hope the rain would abate. Six pints later and still raining, a dejected party moved down to the picnic site and bivied for the night in the cars.

Saturday morning saw an improvement in the weather (which was not to last long). John had trouble boiling his egg due to the fact that he had no stove! So Chris Bryan was apprenticed by him for the weekend. The walk up to the Afon Mawddach was delightful with fine views across the valley to the Rhinoggs, at which point I realised that I had forgotten my camera. A bit of trouble was experienced finding the path through some of the forestry plantation which was not marked on my O.S. map 1957 edition. Descending to the Pont Aber Geirw for elevenses, we had no sooner opened the rucksacks when the first rain of the day arrived, together with a noticeable drop in temperature. A long steady climb up through another forestry plantation in deteriorating weather, across an exposed col and down to Bleanlliw Isae, only to find the river in spate which necessitated a half mile detour up-stream in pouring rain to reach a road bridge.

In view of the prevailing weather conditions, a hurried conference was held, coming to the conclusion that a direct route for Cefn Gawr was the order of the day. During a lull in the rain, we traversed between Moel Llyfnant and Arennig Fawr over a high col and a speedy but steep descent to the forest. Here shelter was sought as yet another storm swept over

the hills. It was now 4.00pm and still the last part to complete. Refortified on Mars Bars etc., we set off and crossed the Trawsfyndd Bala Road. There, in front of us, the great expanse of Mignient looked anything but inviting in the stormy conditions. In true tradition of Mignient we were soon wallowing in bog and thigh high heather. In the distance, perched on the side of the hill, we could see Cefn Gawr. In an endeavour to find easier walking, we made for the higher ground of Arenig Fawr, only to get mixed up in "Turks Heads". There appeared to be no choice but to plod in a direct line for Cefn Gawr, which slowly grew closer and closer. The sky became darker as yet another storm was about to start and in a matter of minutes we were enveloped in the full fury of the storm. Upon reaching the Afon Gerw, one look at the depth and width told us there was no chance of crossing. Cefn Gawr seemed so close but so far away as we turned upstream, into the driving rain. Chris saw the black horseman for the second time that day and complained that Bullstones would be a piece of cake after this.

Welbourn's pipe went out, which demoralised all the party. Brian who had been out in front had found a possible crossing place, a rather dubious looking island in the middle of the river, about twice the size of a dustbin lid and much the same condition. The first section to the island was comparatively easy. Brian completed the second party safe and dry and I threw his rucksack across the him. The rest of the party gathered on the island, whilst I made a safe landing on the far bank. John however, in a flurry to get across, threw his rucksack and at the same time was attached by a severe dose of cramp and fell into the river taking on the appearance of an obsolete submarine with his pipe just above water. I think it was on the third time he surfaced that he muttered between obscenities "Pull me out". Beryl who was quite overcome by the drama taking place before her eyes, leaned over the bank and looked into John's glazed eyes, his Trilby hat floating away downstream. Realizing it was for real, we pulled him onto the bank. The final insult being that he was back on the bank from which he had started! Chris who had failed his 'O' level in the Long Jump showed no improvement when crossing the river and falling short of the bank was pulled out dripping wet. What followed was like a scene from Monty Python. John, after ten false starts left the island, failed to gain sufficient height, fell

short of the far bank and once more disappeared into the murky water to be pulled out by Brian and myself. Beryl quite disillusioned by all that had been happening made a half hearted effort to get across the river, failed and sank slowly into the cold water.

A wet bedraggled party reassembled on the bank and trudged the final half mile in silence up to Cefn Gawr, arriving at 17.45. Once inside, John soon organised Chris to supply him with endless cups of tea whilst he wrung out his socks and trousers. Brian proceeded to get a fire going, which soon brought back the spirits. The evening was spent cooking and drying clothes. John turned in early only to get another severe dose of cramp which was relieved by one of Beryl's special pills.

The next morning, after a good nights sleep and a marked improvement in the weather, the feeling was to take a direct route back to the cars. Little need to be said of the return journey, except that it was very pleasant in the warm sunshine, stopping for a brew in the Afon Mawddach near the disused Gold Mines, before walking the last few miles to the cars, having covered a distance of 35 to 40 miles.

Does the painting of the ram still exist? What is it really like at Cefn Gawr? Only those who attended the meet will know the secrets of Mignient Moor.

C. HOBDAY

Good Friday again saw a gathering of the clans amongst Mr Cameron's caravans in Glen Nevis. Early morning saw the arrival of Mike Key and Peter O'Neil, followed by a large team on the overnight 'Oread Express' from Crewe, British Rail giving way to J. Doughty (Transport) Ltd. for the last two miles to the campsite.

As the weather was fair, we split into three teams to make the best of an afternoon on the Ben; Mike and Pete climbed South Castle Gully; Mike Dyer, John Draper and John Doughty climbed North Castle Gully and Dave Guyler and I climbed 'La Petite'. The first two routes gave snow plods but 'La Petite' gave three good ice pitches. We arrived back at base camp where we found the remaining car-bound travellers who had stopped en route for lunch time suction at Ecklefechen.

Saturday dawned bright but showery and a combined Gregson and Mountain Club team climbed No.5 Gully, negotiating a very large cornice at the top. Other teams walked on the Western Mamores and the CMD arete.

On Sunday, further parties set out over the CMD arete and Western Mamores in steadily worsening weather with squally showers, spindrift and white outs. Occasional breaks in the cloud gave spectacular views of the Devils Ridge. Another large team went to Polldubh and managed to do a couple of routes before they were washed, blown or frozen off the crag and into the Pub at lunchtime.

The weather was worse on Monday morning with cloud down on the tops and a threat of snow. Various permutations of the previous days walks were done with total white out conditions above 300 ft. All three parties had epics, two meeting at the top of Five Finger Gully after doing the CMD arete and North Castle Gully, and the others having some excitement with cornices on Sgurr a'Mhaim.

After the epics on Monday, most decided to fester in Fort William on Tuesday. However, having festered on the Monday, John Linney and friends and Stuart Firth and friends decided to make separate assaults on the Mamores. They climbed Na Gruagaichean from Kinlochleven and An Garbhanach from Steall, respectively, before being driven off the summits by wind, snow and rain.

Wednesday saw the return of brighter weather with frequent snow showers. In view of the high winds and cloud on the tops, we took a valley walk up Glen Nevis to Steall. This was like a mini Himalaya walk-in. Dave Cheshire demonstrated how to fell fully grown trees single handed. Keith Gregson led the way up Steall gorge, swinging from tree to tree, 50 ft above the river. To reach the normal path on the other side of the Glen, a bridge crossing had to be made which consisted of three wire ropes hanging across a torrent. John Draper, Mike Dyer and families fled the mountains for the day and took a trip on the train to Mallaig.

The showers had become less frequent by Thursday morning and most took to the hills again. Keith, Jill, Rock and Dave followed the trade route over the Western Mamores, a superb walk. Mike Dyer and I climbed Carn Mor Dearg and our arrival at the summit coincided with the first vivious squall of the day. Dave Guyler failed for the third time on Castle Ridge (having hardly set foot on it). This time Stuart Firth forgot his crampons. John, Dave and Colin went Munro bagging in the back O' beyond and added three to Dave's collection. They arrived back just before closing time with tales of waist deep snow and Dave complaining "I can map read, if the maps are right!"

With only one day left, everyone hoped for fine weather and a good route. In fact, the forecast was good. Friday dawned crisp and clear. We were away early and avoided the sun for the grind up to the Lochan. After that, it was pleasant to have the sun on our backs for a change. The mountains looked magnificent, with the North face of the Ben particularly impressive, plastered in snow and ice. We were envious of one party going like an express train and already half way up Orion face Direct. By the time we arrived at the Douglas Gap, a high cloud cover had spread from the West, despite the forecast. Being unwilling to get committed, Dave and I retreated, but Keith, Rock and Dave Cheshire went on and later had an epic 1,500 ft descent from the Great Tower when the weather broke in the afternoon.

Saturday arrived with true Scottish weather, heavy rain, cloud level 1,500 ft and the prospect of a journey to warmer climes did not seem less attractive than a day in the hills.

P. BEVERLEY

Friday was to be the last day's climbing of the holiday, so in the Pub the previous night we decided to do the classic Tower Ridge.

There would be two parties, Keith Gregson, 'Rock' Hudson and myself in one and Paul Beverley and Dave Guyler in the other.

On Friday, I felt ill after being sick the night before on Newcastle Brown and fried Haggis ... they don't mix! Our party set off at 9.30 am knowing that Paul and Dave had an hours head start. The route is 4 - 8 hours climbing and 2,000 ft in vertical height so we had to get a move on if we were not to finish the route in the dark.

By the time we had got round to the C.I.C. hut, my head and stomach had returned to normal. We geared up and soon realised that we had only one rope between three of us ... I had left mine in the caravan. Anyway, we set off up the first 200 ft of easy snow gully to the Douglas Gap. On the way up, we met Paul and Dave coming down. They said they had tried the first pitch and didn't want to get committed. We carried on and at the top of the gully we met four bumbles. They messed about on the first pitch for ages while we sat and waited. When they had finally gone, Keith led up the rock which was very icy. We climbed the next section moving together. Here the route goes up a long snow arete and finishes where a leftward traverse across steep snow leads to a long ice section.

At the end of the arete we caught up with the bumbles, so rather than wait, Keith led straight up over steep rock and ice. (The rock is graded V. Diff in summer). The rock was hard to climb in crampons and with an ice axe dangling from your wrist. At the top of this section we looked across to the bumbles and they turned back. I'm sure they did it just to aggravate us!

Now the route went up steepish snow to the base of the 'Little Tower'. This was climbed by a sharp arete which was very tricky because of the unstable cornice which overhung the overhanging 'Echo Wall'. The route went round to the left of the 'Great Tower' on small exposed ledges on hard ice. This was the most difficult section so far, with no secure belays at all adding to the seriousness.

Nearing the top of the 'Great Tower', we caught up with a Scottish Guide and his two clients. The weather had been deteriorating from the start and it had now begun to snow. So much for Paul's brilliant weather forecast! We had done about 1,800 ft of the 2,000 ft and there remained a small chimney which led to the summit of the 'Great Tower' from whence the route descends to the Tower Gap and a short wall and gully to the summit plateau of Ben Nevis.

The Guide said that with the weather getting worse, the rest of the route would not be 'on', (he had done the route before), and the best thing to do was to get off as quickly as possible. We discussed it and eventually agreed on this decision as none of us wanted to bivouac. I was glad that I wasn't one of those stuck on zero or point five for the night.

The belays on the route had been very poor, so abseiling was out of the question and therefore every move had to be reversed. We had just done a hard section so we took some time reversing that. We eventually arrived at the top of the 'Little Tower'. The mental strain was very great, every step and move had to be thought out because we knew in the back of our minds that one mistake could lead to tragedy. To get scared was a luxury we couldn't afford.

When we reached the section where our ascent route had by-passed the bumbles, we reversed the true line. This was the most difficult part, not technically but because we did not know what lay beneath us in the mist. It consisted of 200 ft of steep ice about one or two inches thick veneered over rock. The belays used on the return were ice axes and one suitable placement for a deadboy was found.

The light was fading by the time we reached the top of the first rock pitch, but we knew that all the difficulties were above us and that we would arrive back that night. An abseil sling had been left at the top of the rock pitch and we used that ... it happened to be the only possible abseil on the climb.

On the return to the C.I.C. hut we had some Bovril and chocolate ... the first meal of the day. We also found out the time, it was 8.10 pm. It must have taken a good 3½ hours to descend.

Now it was almost dark and we still had a long way to go out of Corrie Leis and down the pony track. Rock could not see very well in the dark, so Keith walked with him using his torch while I went on ahead to alleviate Jill of her worries for our safety. I arrived at the caravan and stood in the doorway, a dripping heap. Due to the fatigue, all I could say was 'They're still up there!' which didn't help matters much. I eventually managed to tell her that they were alright and coming down. The time was 10.00 pm. Keith and Rock arrived a short time later and after explaining what had happened and changing into dry clothes, we all went to the Pub. We had a meal on our return, one of Jill's lovely stews ... this one had been stewing for a long time.

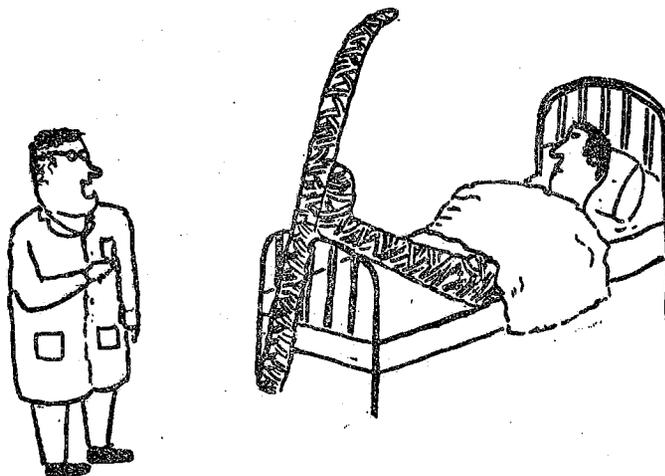
On reflection the climb has taught me a lot about snow and ice and that it is not worth panicking in dicy situations.

I woke up that night freezing cold.

I thought that I was still up there.

My blankets had fallen on the floor.

D. CHESHIRE

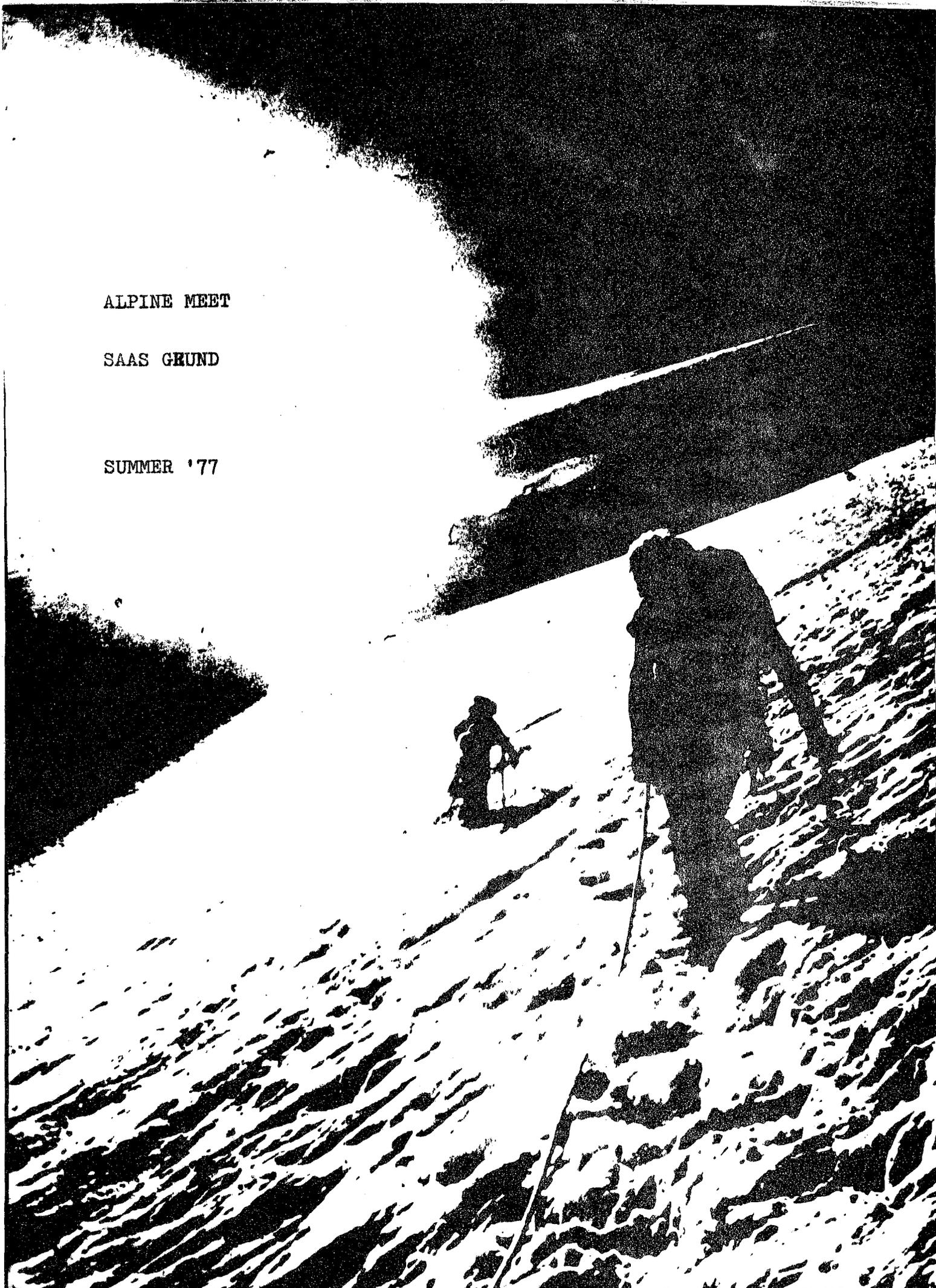


"HOW DID IT HAPPEN?"

ALPINE MEET

SAAS GRUND

SUMMER '77



IGNEOUS FEZOFF DOES IT AGAIN!

ALPS. SUMMER 1977

After months of reading guide books, studying maps and trying to get fit, its something of an anticlimax to be setting out on the first alpine route of the season. However, any feeling of enthusiasm is soon dispelled as the harsh reality of physical effort unfolds.

Phew! Its warm! I'm not going very well, my sack feels heavy and I must tighten my right boot next stop - next stop? At last we move into the shade of the Trift Forest. Cooler now, we march onwards and ever upwards. All too soon we move back into the open and the oppressive heat. Houses appear ahead. "Trift hamlet" I declare. The sound of running water greets us and we stop. "No! Mustn't stop, got to keep moving!" Igneous cries. The rest of us ignore him, after all he is a prat at times. He again preaches the Gospel, looking at his watch and muttering something about guide book time. No one is listening, we are all too busy drinking the cool refreshing water. The inevitable happens of course. We are all ready to move off just as he decides to have a drink himself. Soon we settle back into the monotony of walking, minds wandering aimlessly, moving one foot in front of the other.

Not as many zig-zags as I thought. Wonder what Margy's doing now? Then a certain doubt starts to creep over me. This is too easy. Wish bloody Beverley wouldn't dash off in front. I check the map with Igneous. Puzzled we continue on. Bloody hell! What are those doing there? Through the trees can be seen several cars parked and people picnicing. A sign post confirms my suspicions. We are lost! "Didn't think we were right. Not enough zig-zags". "I thought that" said Igneous, looking at his watch, We retrace our steps quickly, embarrassed by the stares and obvious comments made by the people we had so professionally passed earlier. We seek refuge and find somewhere quiet to read the map. We set off again, this time carefully plotting our way on the map. Eventually

we emerge from the shade into the bright sunlight as if from some dream into the awareness of this fabulous view across the Saastal to the distant Mischabel.

"Must press on!" Igneous says. Silence. The whole vista is absorbed, first in the mind and then on film. "Come on, lets go!" This time we make the effort through to Trift hamlet and, after much determination, we reach Kreuzboden. More water. (No moaning this time from Igneous, obviously converted to the faith of rest with the rest). We share out some sweets and dried fruit and take a long swig of water. The young navigator mutters something about Skippers, Mars bars and Chunky chicken. What a team!

Igneous produces the guide book and looks at his watch. "Think we ought to move on. Must get to the hut before that lot to ensure getting a bed". Still we sit. "I'm off". We all agree. The large party has now caught us up, causing muck and dirt to flow down the stream we have been drinking from. Curse! We set off, driven on by the desire to secure a bed for the night. Over the next rise, the path can be seen winding its way up to the hut and, as usual, in the distance is young Bevel Legs. Gritting my teeth, I set off in hot pursuit, overtaking the large party of teenagers. At last I reach the hut. "Better go and book in" young Beverley suggests. But try as we might this proves very difficult. Outside, Igneous appears looking at his watch. Some distance away, the young navigator follows with Colin at the rear. The large party arrives and immediately takes over the Annexe. Damn! Food becomes the driving force now, so dumping our gear we proceed to the Dining room. Phew! Like a Sauna. After about 45 minutes playing musical chairs, chanting "Besetz, bitter" we establish ourselves at a table and hand our food over to be cooked. Igneous, somewhat perturbed about not having secured a bed yet, suggests we fill in the Hut Book, as this may be what is required to secure a bed. So hopefully we fill it in, much to the interest of the other British guys. During our meal, however, it becomes quite obvious that we and our fellow Brittons, Masters of the Alps, descendants

of Mummery, Whympers and Botchington, countrymen of Hilary Tensing, are doomed to sleeping on the floor! This calls for a distinct change of attitude. First of all, we make a mess of the hut book by crossing out our previous entry and changing our itinerary for the following day and then lose the pen. Next, we allow Igneous to show some Swiss Guides and their clients our Guide book knowing that this will confuse them. Finally, we are convinced by Igneous that it is getting late and the only thing to do is to take the law into our own hands. So, displaying the courage which is hidden in every British breast, vastly outnumbered, fortified by expensive beer and cigars, we clear table and chairs and make ourselves comfortable on the floor. We switch the light off and finally make rude remarks to the people still sitting it out until they eventually rise and leave us in peace.

A short time after, we are disturbed by the Warden, torch in hand, brush in the other and we get the feeling that he is a little irritated by our presence on his dirty floor. Having swept an area, he reappears with several mattresses and indicates by taking a swipe at the nearest body (Igneous) that we should move onto them. This is followed, I am sad to relate, by an argument between two Englishmen, one who is in favour of having a window opened and the other who is quite determined not to. Obviously the strain is beginning to tell. Eventually we get peace and quiet at 9.45pm.

BANG! BANG! "Who the bloody hell's that" someone moans. By the light of a torch, Igneous can be seen rummaging in his rucksack. He mutters something and almost kneels on the young navigator's head, who it must be said disorientated everyone by sleeping arse backwards. (Mind you, he does eat a lot of sardines!). "Where's your bog paper?" he enquires, of a sleepy Colin. "In my sack". Three or maybe four sacks later, gold is struck! Paper found he disappears into the night. He returns by the creaking door and as he finally settles down for the night, he is heard to say, "Don't worry about oversleeping Chaps, I've set my alarm for 3.00am!".

The Warden woke us at 2.00am. How does he do it?

J. LINNEY

THE FLETSCHHORN - LAGGINHORN TRAVERSE

SAAS FEE SUMMER 1977

It was with some relief that we left the Weissmies Hut (8941 ft) at 3.30am having undergone a boot inspection by an English guy who was panicking because he could not find his. Swearing and cursing, he went tearing round everyone almost on hands and knees, muttering something about £60 a pair and questioning the parentage of some unknown, and as it happened, fictitious person. It all ended when he made a dart to grab someone who had slipped by him and tripped over a pair of boots. His boots! "I must have left them out all night" he remarked, as he limped back into the Hut.

'A cairned path crosses stony ground to the East. Take this for a few minutes', the Guide book says. "Is that a cairn?" "Is that?" Two, three or should it be four minutes later? We stop and check the map. "Must be somewhere here where we turn off". On a bit further. "Reckon this is it". Well, the decision has to be made so I lead off to the left. The others follow and soon we pick up the path. The first light of morning reveals the foot of the lateral moraine of the Talli Glacier and where this eventually runs into the glacier, we stop to put our torches away and get the ice axes out. Getting brighter all the time now, we cross the glacier diagonally to a 'circular hollow' (a bloody great hole!). The view, looking back, is fabulous. The first shafts of sunlight are kissing the peaks of the Mischabel. To our right, the pointed Jagihorn, black and cold, looks fierce. Still further right, the long pinnacled ridge of the Jagigrat (which we hope to do next day) looks hard. In front of us, the usual rout zig-zags up a scree and snow slope to attain the ridge above, but this looks a bit loose and long winded. We decide to follow a steep snow slope which goes straight up to the neck, under the snowy Western shoulder of the Fletschhorn.

Crampons biting into the still hard snow, the valley below us begins

to shrink away as we gain height. The altitude begins to tell and soon we are all panting heavily with the effort, leaning on our ice axes like drunken men. On again! That distant horizon never seems to get any nearer. I make a vow not to look up, but eventually curiosity gets the better of me and I have a quick peep, then vow not to look again. At last the slope eases and we reach some rocks to stop for a rest. Rock joins me. "How are you going?" he asks me. "Great!" I reply, then think to myself - liar! "Young Beverley is going well, again". "Yes" says Rock "wonder if he knows he is going to wrong way?". "He'll soon find out!" Soon we are joined by Colin and Dave. "All right, youth?" "What do you think of the Alps then?" I ask Dave who is on his first alpine route. "Not my idea of a holiday. Wish I was at Blackpool". Obviously he is enjoying it as much as the rest of us. "You'll think differently when you're sitting in the campsite, then you'll wish you were back up here!" "It's all in the mind" Colin adds..... and that's true!

We set off again across the upper snowfields of the Gruben Glacier and a rising traverse takes us steeply up to the NNW ridge to a shoulder at 12497 ft. Much colder now, we press on slowly up the ridge without any difficulty, apart from the sheer effort requires to gain height. Eventually, I see Rock and then Paul settle down on their rucksacks and I stagger up to join them just below the summit. The time, 7.45am. Colin and Dave join us, both obviously in good spirits. We take the usual round of photographs and admire the view.

Across from the Fletschhornjoch, the Lagginhorn, with its large plume of cloud, dominates the view. Linking the two is the NNE ridge, which we are to ascend. To the left of the Lagginhorn, the dark valleys of Italy merge into a sea of cloud. To the right, away in the distance, the large complex mass of Monte Rosa stands out supreme. Behind us, the distant Oberland peaks turn the horizon into a choppy sea. All this makes the effort really worthwhile.

We say farewell to Colin and Dave who are to return to the hut and set off down the East ridge to the Fletschhornjoch. Quite steep and narrow

at first, the ridge soon merges into the upper snowfield of the Fletschhorn Glacier. Bearing right, we plunge round and down the vast horseshoe, the far side of which is the Joch and the start of the NNE ridge, which from our present position, certainly looks narrow and interesting. We have for some time been following two people who are some distance ahead. When we reach the Joch, they are just moving off up the ridge. We nod in acknowledgement to them, dig out the climbing gear and rope up. Paul leads off followed by Rock and I bring up the rear. Moving together, we climb the initial snow slopes out of the Joch, round a crest and up some small snow gullies lying at the foot of the first rock barrier. A shout makes us look up. About 250 ft above us, the other two can be seen and it is obvious that they are pitching the whole of the ridge. Within ten minutes or so, we catch them up below a steep wall and of course have to wait. I take some photographs and admire the view, Paul and Rock drill holes in the snow and generally fidget about. It's at moments like this that you really feel the vast solitude and quietness of the mountains. At last we can move. My turn to lead. Placing my right crampon points in a thin crack and finding a hold for my right hand, I step up. Putting my left foot by the side of my right, my left hand probes round the corner and just as the drop to the left of me begins to register, I find a small crack. I step up with my left foot, tension building up, then leaning off my left hand, I move up awkwardly. One more move and it's all over, reaching for the top and on good holds, I step up and round the left hand face, oblivious now to the drop below and join the last man of the other rope on a good ledge. "Great!" We acknowledge one another and I belay myself and then proceed to bring Rock up. I can relax a bit. "That was good". Up till now, I have felt something of a passenger, due to my slow acclimatisation, but the last pitch has renewed my confidence. Paul leads through across a delicate snow crest which brings us under a small wall, broken by a corner leading to a ledge above. Paul leads again followed by Rock. Paying out the rope, a sharp bell-like ring from beneath my feet startles me. I look down. There, lying in the middle of the ledge, is my figure of eight! Must have fallen from my belt. Eight inches outwards is the edge of the ledge and below a steep slope falls away for 1600 ft.

Immediately in front, a two inch wide crack separates the ledge from the main face. The first thing which strikes me is how lucky I am not to lose my figure of eight and the second thing is the position I am in. Less than two minutes ago, I was oblivious to all but the climbing. Now I have visions of me, my figure of eight and the ledge toppling down that snow slope below. Strange how a small thing can set off a train of thought. A shout from above breaks my trance. I remove my belay, pick my figure of eight up and rush up the rock eager to join my companions. Again we must wait, but slowly we are making progress. More narrow snow crests and gullies follow with the odd rock step. At last we are poised at the foot of a steep gully leading, we estimate, to the top of the difficulties. Paul suggests I lead. I agree and move the first few feet to the bottom and begin the assault.

Scraping snow from the holds, I move up, cast around with my ice axe to find some purchase for the pick, move up and repeat the exercise several times. "Must find a runner! Ah! That will do." Bridging across the gulley now, I make several moves up, then an awkward move out and onto a steep snow slope leading to a narrow crest. "Snow's getting a bit soft" panting. "This is exhilarating stuff!" I kick into the steps which appear, left by the previous party and move up. A shout from below to tell me I have run the rope out 130 ft. Heart pounding, I look for a belay, dig out a large rock and pass a sling round it. "Taking in". Rock joins me and I elect to carry on to the top of the slope which is the end of all difficulty and belay. Paul and Rock. Soon we join the other two on the summit. Relaxed and happy at 13153 ft.

Taking care to get comfortable we eat some dried fruit and chocolate. I look at my watch, surprised it's only 1.15pm. The view is again fantastic. Across the other side of the Saastal, a bank of cloud lies over the Mischabel, dividing the summits from the alpine meadows below, almost as if to underline their majesty. Away to our left, the Weissmies is partially enveloped in cloud. Then comes Monte Rosa in the distance,

then the Mischabel and behind the Weishorn stands apart. Away to our right, the Fletschorn and beyond the peaks of the Oberland. This is surely what was meant by "Because its there!".

We shake hands with the other two guys, take some photographs for them and then wave them off as they descend. We have the summit to ourselves. Time to move. The descent is uneventful, apart from the number of times we take our crampons off only to have to put them on again!

One particular spot is very slippery as Rock finds out to his cost. We reach the hut and join Colin and Dave in a brew and a cigar. And so, at 4.00pm ended for me one of the best days experience in the Alps, so far.

J. LINNEY



The old Weissmies
hut

A DAY ON THE WEISSMIES

SUMMER 1977

The moment I stepped out of the car I decided I liked Saastal. Not that that was altogether a good omen for someone whose first impressions are often deceptive, but each day as the holiday went by I liked it more and more. When bad weather finally screwed everything up and we had to leave, I was sorry to go as it had been a very, very good holiday.

In terms of an impressive list of ascents, it had not been outstanding for me at least. It gives some satisfaction to reflect that the list included the Weissmies, which for no very clear reason I had been particularly keen to climb.

To write about the ascent of the Weissmies by the Triftgrat is not an easy chore. Let's be honest; it is only a plod, but then I'm naive enough to enjoy happy plods. There were not even any epic foul-ups that usually enliven mountaineering narratives, which was strange since I was o.i.c. navigation. I had little choice in that, as my companion was Dave Jefferies, the "Young Navigator". Now I don't doubt that he may have pretensions to youth - more so than me at any rate, but a navigator? Although he may have all the competence that befits a graduate of Glenmore Lodge, he avoids a map like it was a carrier of rabies and his compass hasn't seen the light of day since January 1970.

The Weissmieshutte is a pleasant place, more so if you are a German speaking guide and member of the S.A.C. and less so if you are an English speaking pauper and membr of the A.A.C. Monday night was frankly bloody, but Tuesday night we got beds and 3.00am saw D.J. and I disturbing the slumbers of the Jagigrat team (Messrs Beverley, Hudson and Linney). After a breakfast that is best described as thin, we were out into the cold morning.

A large bright star in the East pointed the way up the moraine for us, doubtless without the least religious significance. Behind us the sun touched the topmost peaks of the Mischabel range turning purple snows to pale gold. The moraine gave way to a snowfield which was straightforward and unreasonably long-lived. Then we were above the Triftgletscher and could see the route.

The Guidebook (written in 1975) says to gain the Triftgrat by a snowfield which leads steeply up to the ridge between Point 3820 m and the summit but that was clearly a no-go area in 1977. The state of the glacier had changed appreciably, and as far as that face was concerned for the worse. Clearly the route the guides were using brought people up to the ridge to the west of Point 3820 m. thereby avoiding the tottery looking ice cliffs that overhung the Guidebook route. And, as we now saw, the guides were out in force, leading clients up by the score.

We thrashed across the Glacier and climbed up steep but easy snow slopes, zig zagging upwards to joint the Triftgrat, a broad sinuous snow ridge with massive cornices overhanging the vertical cliffs that form its southern boundary. At this stage we decided to put the string on, again for no very clear reason except that everyone else was using theirs and we didn't want to feel left out. Also it was new and shiny and I was itching to use it.

D.J. hadn't carried coils before and as the ridge was fairly flat it seemed sensible for him to go in front so that I could shout abuse at him when he stepped on my new shiny rope with his crampons (which he didn't in the event). It was a bad decision. He now decided that we were going to overtake every other rope on the mountain. We went past three teams at a bound. In the distance was another team, he can't be going to..... oh no! Then another. My lungs felt as if someone had poured boiling lava into them but still Dave thrashed on whilst I followed stumbling and cursing. Even so it was flattering to reach the top with so many behind us who had once been in front.

The view was worth all the pain. To the west stood Monte Rosa, bulky and without peer and then the Mischabel, now in the full blaze of a powerful sun. Saastal was clear of cloud as were the Mischabel tops but a thin band of cloud stretched between the valley and the tops at about the height of the Mittaghorn-Egginer and the effect was to give to the tops an other-worldly impression of height, of mountains towering above mountains. Looking north the tops of the Oberland peeped out of a sea of cloud, Aletschhorn, Finsteraarhorn and Jungfrau and a host of others. What a playground! Nearer at hand the Lagginhorn was flying a cloud plume and looked delectable.

Regrettably we had no option but to return the way we had come though the S.S.E. ridge, running off to Almagelleralp seemed to start with a magnificent knife edge arete and looked good value for an F, allegedly the easiest route on the mountain. Still we were to see the Almagelleralp a few days later.

The descent is rapidly told - soft snow balling up under our crampons, sun bouncing off the bowl of the Triftgletscher and burning our exposed skin like hot irons. We had a splendid picnic on the moraine and by 12.25 were at the hut, contemplating a beer and a cigar and the memory of a superb day.

The descent of the valley is another story, stumbling down interminable zig zags in the drizzle with the torches failing. We started at 9.00pm and reached the tents at 11.15pm. I was barely able to keep my eyes open long enough to get through my half a can of Newcastle Brown. Which in itself was a kind of recommendation for a memorable day.

C. BARNARD

A LITTLE ROCK ICE AND SNOW, THE NORTH RIDGE OF THE WEISSMIES

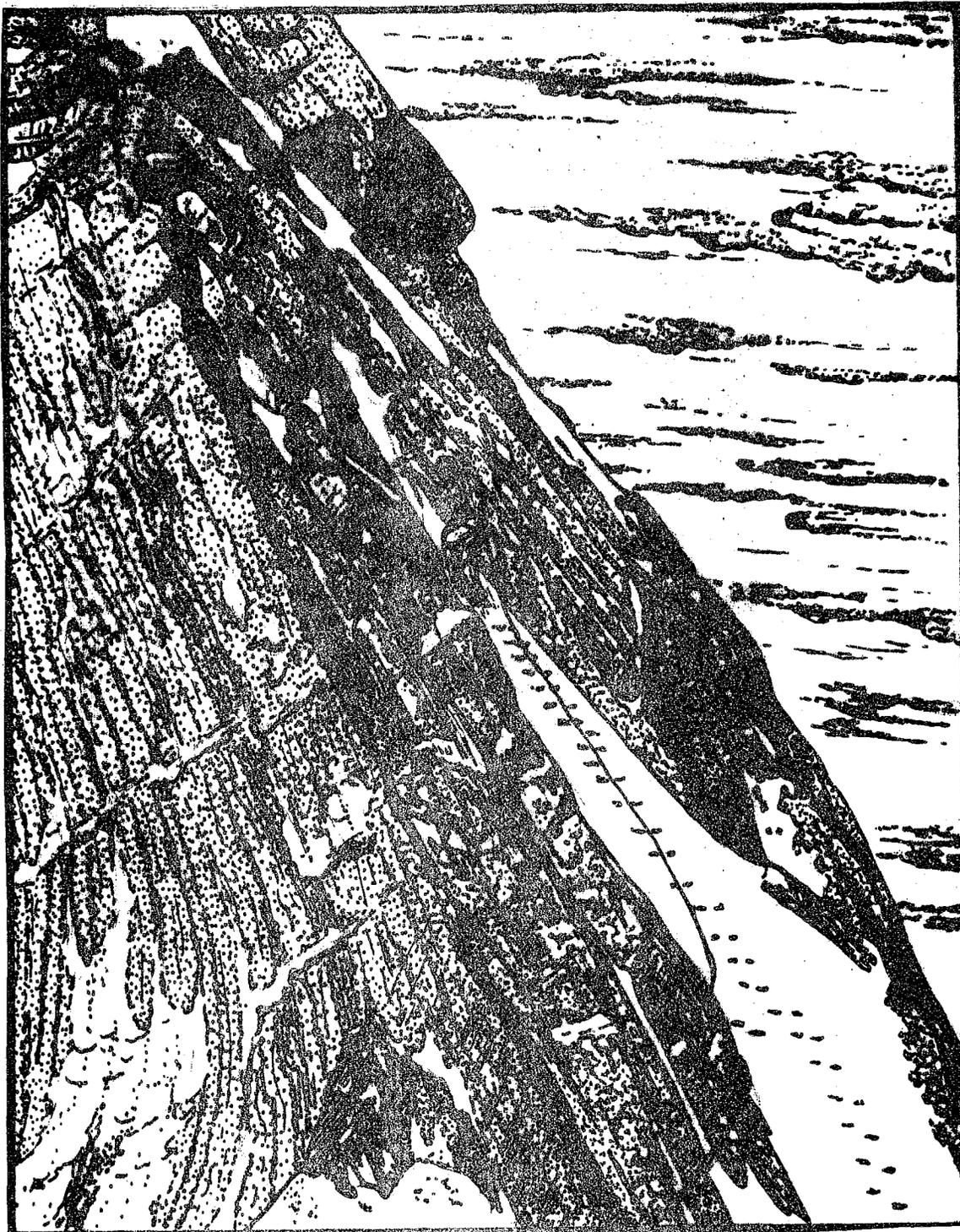
ALPS. SUMMER 1977

Two days had passed since the last route and now a restlessness had set in which could only be alleviated by action. But what action? The weather was poor with thick, heavy clouds hanging over the mountains, often releasing a downpour of rain. Well, it would either be a traverse of the Weissmies, or, if the weather continued, a short route on the Jagihorn.

The walk up to the Weissmies hut passed as all hut walks pass, slowly though in this instance, the spits of rain and signs of a storm made rests few and of short duration. "What a waste of time coming to the hut" and "ten francs hut fee!" were the only comments as we looked out from the nearly empty hut at the flurry of snow. Even the Jagihorn would be out if much of this snow settled. There was little point in checking the guide book and it was too early to ask for an evening meal. We looked enviously at a group of Germans in the corner, uncorking a sixth bottle of wine, followed by a massive piping hot meal. We looked at our packet of soup, a tin of green beans and a tiny tin of meat taken in the interests of weight, of course. We had a piece of home-made cake, looked yet again to see if the storm had passed, but no. The Germans must have known it was going to be a rest day tomorrow for they opened their seventh bottle of wine. The guardian did us fairly proud from our meagre rations. We became a little happier when looking outside we could see a brightness in the West casting a silvery sheen over the already soggy, newly fallen snow.

At 3.30am there was silence. Must be bad weather so the Guardian didn't wake us. But no! Upon getting up we saw a perfect clear night, with the Milky Way arcing across the sky. The Guardian produced the Tee Waasser. Quickly collecting gear, donning boots while still eating a little bread and jam we were two half awake climbers away first at 4.00am.

The approach started up tight ziz-zags to reach the lip of the moraine at the edge of the Hohlaub Glacier. Here, we put on crampons before setting out up the glacier. The snow was in reasonable condition, smooth and steepening towards the Lagginjoch. There was more snow than in most years as there was not a vestige of a crevasse and the snow passed smoothly up to the col without any rubble. The day dawned with a deep blue sky, only interrupted by wisps of high cloud. We cut off to the



right (SE) before reaching the col. This brought us to a steepening slope which we soloed quickly to reach the ridge in about guide book time.

Looking down from the ridge, Italy was a mass of boiling clouds, bright with the low angled sun, unbroken except for the distant Gran Paradiso, like a sea stack on a foam covered shore.

Belayed, Keith set off up gently inclined slabs made very tricky by a thick coating of verglas. I lead through, finding the climbing pleasant, never hard but always with enough difficulty to give enjoyment. There followed short pitches of steep rock, still verglased although by now the sun was starting to melt it. Traverses onto the West face gave mixed climbing. Again the guide book was way out in saying that this section 'had much loose rock' as this year it was embedded in the hard snow and not a single rattle of falling rock was heard. A steeper wall with a small bulge was climbed using a leftward trending crack which led to the snow plastered ridge above. We traversed below this on hard neve lying at 50° - 55° with isolated moves onto rocky ribs which protruded this icy carapace. Horizontal pitches brought us at last to below the crux pitch as defined in the guide book. It was not that steep, though without any prominent lines, or if there were any they were iced up. This pitch needed chipping out and the removal of crampons was required. Keith moved off, traversing to reach an ice runnell. The convexity of the slope increased with each step. The following pitch was 55° - 60° , a fine pitch and I quickly gained the ridge again.

A breeze was blowing and long fingers of mist were creeping up the couloirs on the Italian face, while over on the Mischabel range, squadrons of clouds formed the vanguard of a gathering storm. Alternate passages of leading through or moving together on easier ground followed, over gendammes, along icy ledges, down little steps and then more committing moves in glazed corners and short slabs. All this gained us height slowly. However, after $2\frac{1}{2}$ hours, one hour over time, we reached point 3722.

Far to the East, the Bernina was still not submerged beneath the clouds, but closer the Dom and Taschorn were lost to view. Italy was now dark and cold looking and a rumble of thunder was heard. No time to sit, just a few moments to sort out the rope, then off again. Delicate pitches at grade II/III were climbed giving some fine positions above the West face.

The ridge reared up towards point 3830. A short pitch was descended and now we were confronted by an open crack, six to nine inches wide. Surely that was not the way? But this time it had to go for the left hand side was a holdless wall, whilst on the right, which appeared to be the normal way, was nearly vertical icy-snow looking most unstable. The leader placed his right leg into the crack and jammed the right arm and pushed up, trying to make the crampons stick on a slight hold on the edge of the crack. Balancing on this and now pulling with the left arm, a few more feet were gained. The grating of crampons on smooth rock told of laboured progress. The crack was now holdless, not a wrinkle on which to stand. The right leg was braced against the unstable icy-snow, while the left was brought up and placed with little faith on the edge of the wide crack, thus producing a precarious bridging action. Hands searched for a grip, finding nothing they searched again and finally curled round a tiny rugosity. A few more feet were gained. The holds became better and more continuous progress was made to reach the top of the pitch.

We continued along the serrated crest, brittling with its rocky needles, turning each pitch into a slalom course where you looked ahead, trying to reduce the distance to a minimum but without losing time by taking the wrong line. We moved quite fast but the 1½ hours given by the guide book to point 3830 had already passed. We were now confronted by a steep pillar, partly clothed in a mantle of ice. A mantle not only of platy verglas but in bulbous and meringue like masses, poised to tinkle down at the first touch.

Keith set off but after a few feet found that it would not go with crampons on, so these were removed, after which slow progress was made. Belayed, I followed up the steepening wall. Fifteen feet of awkward traversing leftwards brought me to below a narrow crack, but as yet some feet above. Out of balance, I gained height by undercut holds, while my feet slipped on tiny ice ledges. I stretched up for a nice gritstone looking crack. Hand in, clenched fist but no solid jam only a slow slipping requiring a rapid movement which soon brought me to the top.



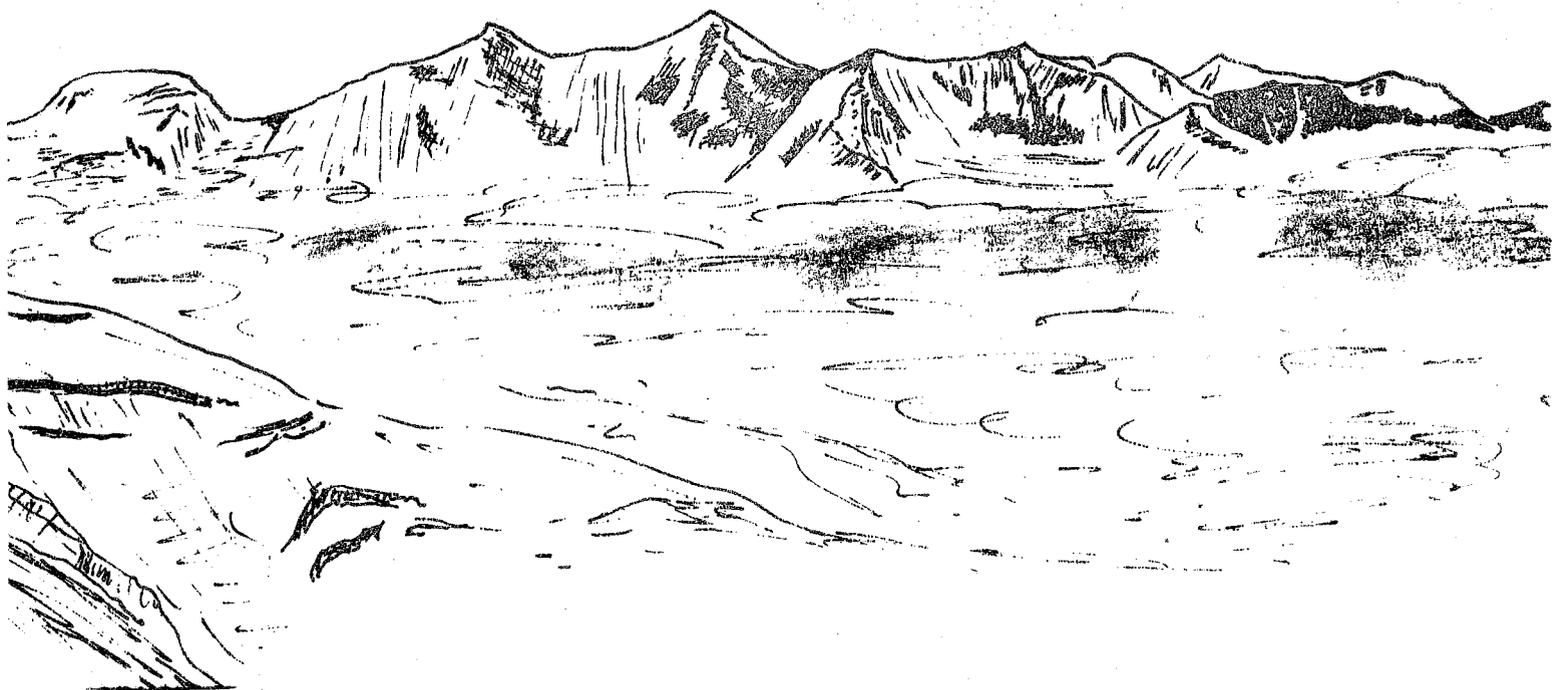
The wind was distinctly cutting and we moved together whatever the terrain as it was too cold belaying in the shadows. The ridge flattened as we came abreast of the last rock islands, sitting on a broadening snow crest. We had not rested since leaving the hut, so under the shelter of a small gendarme we ate a few raisins and a block of chocolate, washed down with tasteless water.

Up again, we now plodded along the snowy ridge. A steeper section intervened which made the rate of ascent slower. Eyes glued to the ground six feet in front, thereby hoping that upon looking up a greater distance would have been achieved. At long last, the ridge passed into a gentle dome and the summit was reached.

Not the longest for views; a round of photographs and a good long rest for the sun had retired into the thickening clouds. A peel of thunder from the Mischabel range, plus the columns of mist streaming over the cols from Italy, told of a gathering storm. Better get the descent over with as soon as possible, followed by a hot drink at the campsite, knowing that by then the weather could do us no harm.

We had another route and a fine one - the North ridge of the Weissmies.

R. HUDSON



Alphubel

Taschhorn

Dom

Lenzspitze

Nadelhorn

Mischabel group from the Weissmies.

17 - 19 JUNE 1977

PROLOGUE

*'Tis a sad and sorry sight you are
As stand ye, sightless, at the Bar,
But courage soon you'll need instead
When morning brings that throbbing head.*

*And, though just now you're on your feet,
And with 'the lads' you can compete,
Your eyes 'neath furrowed brows do peer
Those lips now have that rubbery leer.*

*When we last saw you, out the back,
While on your way to hit the sack,
A grip of iron you had, all tense,
On the post outside the "Gents".*

*Then in the morning light that dawned,
The many rose and stretched and yawned,
Saw you emerge from your bolt-hole
And fill again that plastic bowl.
Oh! David Cheshire, Deary Me!
Qualified for Gregson's PhD.*

Well, it surely looked as if it would rain as the eleven of us moved into residence at the rear of the 'George' on Friday night. Tents up - 'no pegs' Peel required assistance - we swiftly shifted into the bar and just as swiftly Gregson was two pints up. He was, however, manfully pursued to the Bitter end by our latest champion PhD beer swiller, Dave Cheshire, who, as the night wore on, found the toilets increasingly attractive. So attractive infact, that when we all trooped out at closing time (?) he was found clinging to the post outside them with a faraway look in his eyes. It grieves me to admit, we left him!

In the cold grey light of morn, it could be seen that it had rained in the night - at least the plastic bowl outside David Cheshire's tent was full of something, so to get away from it, we all went to Dovedale. Numerous routes were done, Hortus, Simeon, Silicon, Boomerang, Topsy Turvey, Meander, Fetish, Campanile drew our fire, along with a new route

'Woodlouse Wall' uncovered by Nat Allen, just along from Simeon.

Evening found us back with the other arrivals, and after a clean-up, able to slake our thirst justifiably, before sitting down to an excellent meal in convivial company. Fred Allen along with Janes managed to turn up just as Burgess and Ron Chambers went off to do the Girdle of Raven crag (minus the final move!). The rest of the evening and early morning passed quickly and bed and aspro were taken about 2.00am. All but five stayed out and camped or slept in cars littered about the field, and that some regretted something they'd done the previous evening was obvious when we surfaced on Sunday morning.

Following a vicious football match - I saw young children hacked to the ground - climbing for Sunday became divided between Dovedale and Beeston Tor. Several people had arrived for the day - Pete Scott, Janet Burgess, Brian West, Ken Norman, Chris Wilson and Sally. Tom Green chose to go to Dovedale with Pete Scott and had an excellent, if tiring day, on Venery, The Claw and Bill Bailey. Rib-wrecker Davis took photographs, whilst the other teams did the Break, Filter, Beginners Luck and the Jug. Over at Beeston, Central Wall, Molusc, Lynx, Ocelot, Buzz, Oakover Grooves and West Wall were done by mixed parties under the now hot Sun. Back at the campsite, a gradual leaving completed a very enjoyable weekend. Thanks to all who went and who made it what it was - I wonder how Radders got on with his goldfish pond? Those present were:- Brenda and Fred Allen ($\frac{1}{2}$), Nat Allen, Paul Beverley, Margaret and Ken Bryan, Janet and Derrick Burgess, Pat and Derek Carnell, Kath and Ron Chambers, David Cheshire, Dennis Davis, Andy Dunham and Judy, Margaret and Graham Foster, Tom Green and Lucia, Jill and Keith Gregson, Ray Handley and Sue, Ursula and Colin Hobday, Peter Janes, Margaret and Howard Johnson, Miles Moseley, Ken Norman, Jean, Peter and Simon O'Neil, Molly and Harry Pretty, Chris Radcliffe, Jo and Brian Royle, Ron Sant and Yvonne Peter Scott, Beryl Strike, new daddy Brian West, Chris Wilson and Sally. A total of 46 plus assorted children. My apologies if you came and I didn't see you, and please come next year, especially Sally in those shorts (Fred would have stayed if he'd known)!!

D. CARNELL

SCIENCE IN MOUNTAINEERING

(1) WINDSHIELD FOR CAMPING GAS STOVES

Take a 5'3" (1.60 metres) length of ordinary kitchen tin foil of approximately 12" width and fold in the middle to halve the length. Make a small fold, of say half an inch, at the top and bottom to give rigidity to the sheet and perhaps also a slight fold at each end for the same reason. Now, fold the sheet in a concertina manner, about 1½" at a time, to finish with folded tin foil of 1½" by about 10" long. Folded again to 5" this can be carried in a wallet if necessary and when opened concertina manner round a bivouac gas stove, gives excellent protection from high winds. Snow will melt twice as quickly with the shield thus saving time and fuel.

R. COLLEDGE

(2)

Dr. Malcolm Slesser, the well known Scottish Scientific Technologist, a man with an equal head for heights and figures. Slesser was the first to point out that:-

$$\frac{P^2}{W} - 2 p = \frac{2 O T}{E.N.} \quad \text{SMC Journal 1958}$$

Nylon mountaineering rope can absorb an impact kinetic energy of 0.253 ft lb/foot length per lb tensile strength. In a tight spot, a cool headed leader will consult his Slesserian Tables to calculate the chances of the rope parting under the impact of a falling climber. Many leaders have probably fallen with their calculations incomplete. If that were the case it would be doubly unfortunate because the tables generally confirm what is already feared. THE ROPE WILL BREAK!

From: 'One Man's Mountains' T. Patey

(3) YOUR LIFE IN YOUR HANDS A technical report on karabiners and tapes

Climbers and Mountaineers usually accept a certain element of risk or uncertainty as being part of the sport. They usually aim to minimise these elements by taking some basic safety measures. These measures are based on a premise that the equipment used is sound and will not fail in the event of the risk envisaged occurring. Even so, many will ask the following questions:-

- 1 How safe is the system in use?
- 2 How long can the gear be used with safety?
- 3 What is the best way to get the most from the equipment?

In this article, I shall present several facts and figures to try to answer the above points with special reference to karabiners and tapes. Please note that any figures quoted have been derived in laboratory conditions, i.e. theoretical ideal situation. In practice, these figures may well be lower due to the conditions of use.

Karabiners

There are many shapes and size currently available on the market in alloy or steel and recently even a range of colours. When selecting a karabiner it is important to look at the latch design. Most of the modern designs utilise a pin and slot design (Fig. 1). The advantage of this form of latch over the older claw design (Fig. 2) is that under load the pin moves down into the slot, thus preserving the link of forces and thereby maintaining the ultimate strength. If a claw design latch is loaded the claw will slip under load and eventually the keeper moves out past the latch and a 'keeper open' position is assumed. The karabiner is very much weaker in this mode. In tests on Stubai karabiners, the difference was between 35-60% of the maximum theoretical load. This would potentially be enough to allow failure in a fall. It could be argued that most of the claw type latches are found in screw gate karabiners, but if the screw sleeve is needed to hold the latch together, then it is itself contributory to the load circuit and this is

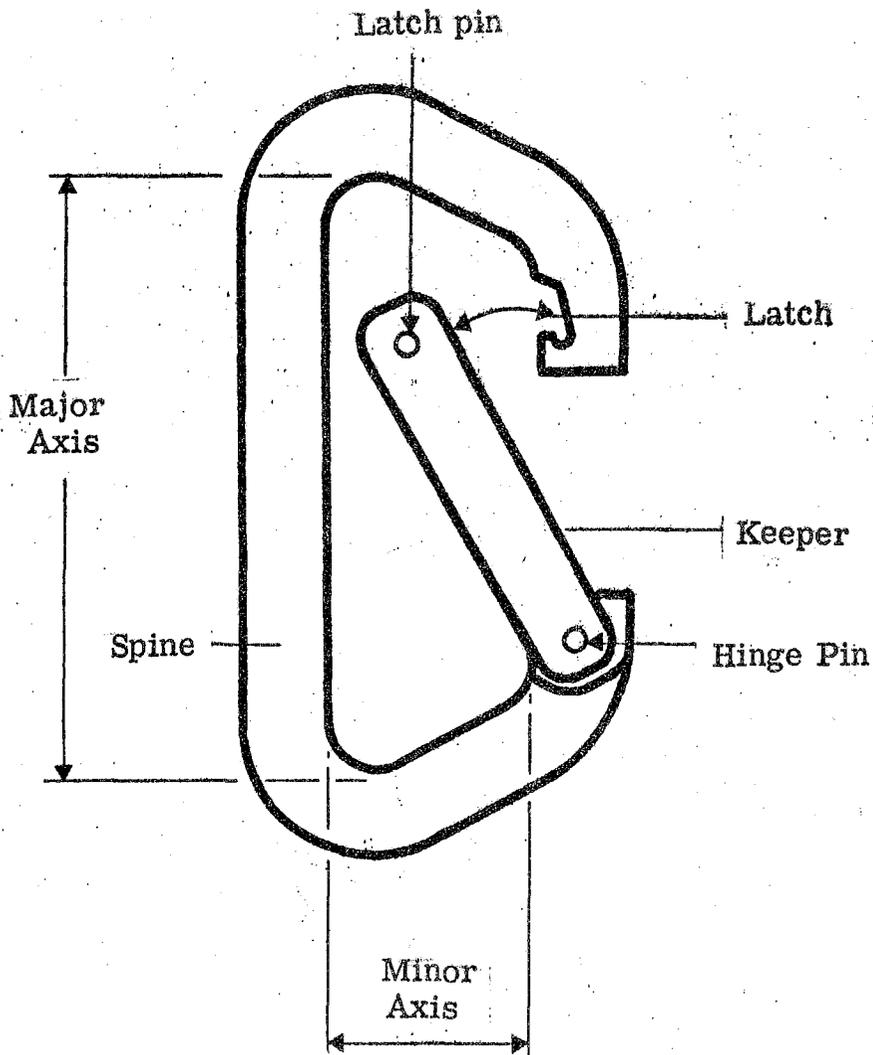


Fig.1. The parts of a typical karabina.

not its correct function. The screw sleeve should be a safety measure to prevent accidental opening of the keeper and no more.

The shape of the karabiner is also important. Several designs are made by drop forging, i.e. they are blanked out from a sheet of material. Generally, this type has a very accute internal angle when compared to a bent wire design. A good

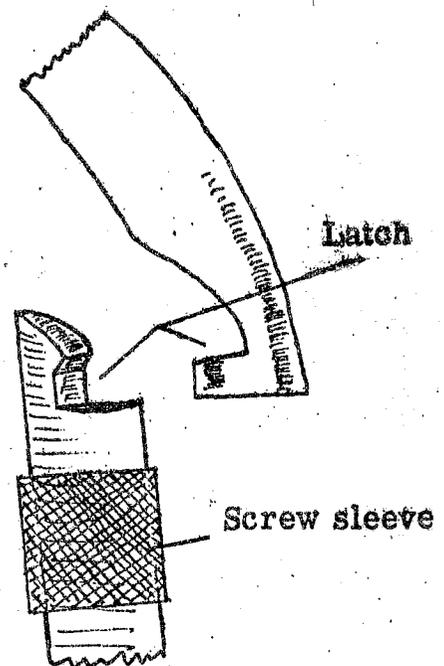


Fig.2. Screw gate latch design.

comparison is seen between such as the Stubai Super Chrome Vanadium 5,400 Kg and one of the Clog alloy Dee shaped karabiners. This internal angle greatly affects the ultimate breaking load of tapes passed over the karabiners. In tests on several shapes of karabiner, using tape slings, it was seen that the strength of a 25 mm dyed sling was reduced to 1,650 Kg when over a Stubai Dee (steel screw gate) karabiner (Fig. 3). This represented a sling strength loss of 42%. If a sling must be loaded over a karabiner, try to make sure that it is over a long angled karabiner.

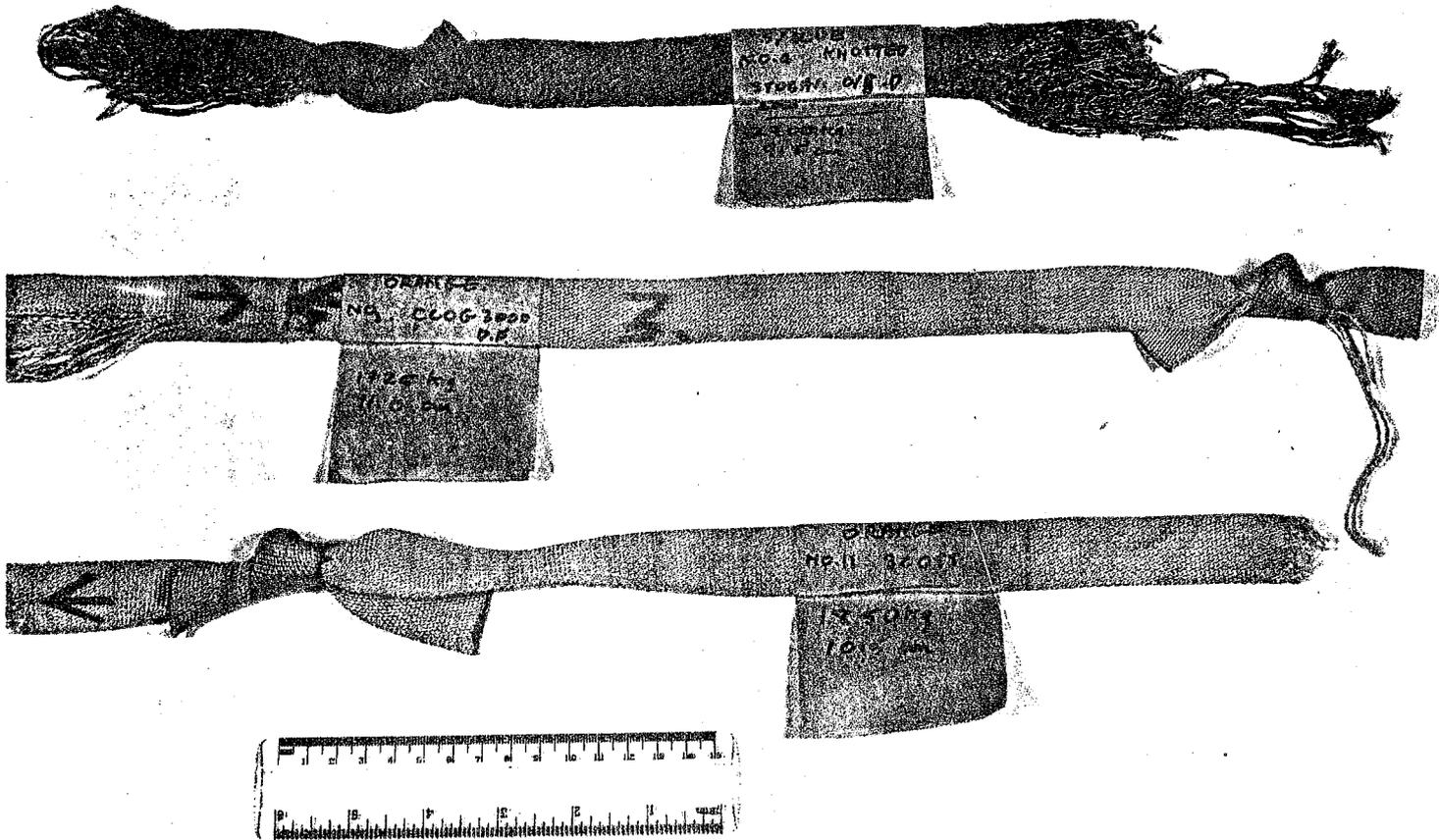


Fig.3.

Weight is a further factor to look at. Nowadays, there is little point in lumping steel karabiners when alloy counterparts are as strong or

Fig.3. Three failed tapes over various karabiners.

stronger and weigh much less. It is generally recognised that maximum loads are seen in a fall factor 2 situation i.e. a free fall distance of twice the rope length. In this situation, the force and the arrested climber and his/her belay is about 1,200 Kg. Nearly double that force would act on a running belay i.e. about 2,400 Kg. Allowing a safety margin for conditions of use, the maximum that should be needed of a karabiner is 3,900 Kg. This would be more than sufficient for all legitimate climbing needs (this therefore excludes towing cars, use on winches, etc). There is little sense in buying a heavy karabiner that will hold 5,400 Kg when a lighter one will always be sufficient.

Clog have recently started marketing a small Dee shaped karabiner which weighs about 50 grms (2 ounces) and has a quoted strength of 2,100 Kg. It has been designed primarily for lightweight runners and aid climbing. Its use is particularly recommended where the runner strength is much lower, e.g. on small wires. More recently, Salewa have brought out a tubular karabiner. However, one of the problems with it is that only light finger pressure is needed to push the keeper past the latch. Until this has been resolved it seems to be a risky proposition. It does however show the trend to ultra light weight karabiners which are still quite strong. This example is stamped 2,000 Kg. Finally, inspect the karabiners when buying to make sure there are no cracks, particularly at the hinge and latch pins. Generally surface blemishes will have no effect on the strength but if you are not happy, don't buy it.

Tapes

There are two forms of tape constructed from either nylon or polyester. Commonly Nylon 66 is used for mountaineering tape. Its properties are such that it has a good inherent elasticity and high strength. Thus the tape has a very high resistance to shock loads. However, it is readily attacked by acids and will absorb a comparatively high amount of water, whereupon it shows a marked loss of strength. Polyester, by comparison, has a low elasticity, is acid resistant (not totally!) does not absorb much water and even when wet will retain its strength. It is,

however, susceptible to alkalis. Generally, polyester is not suitable for situations of potentially high dynamic loads, hence its use is restricted to single rope techniques.

Whilst on the subject of acid and alkali attack, the following quote is well worth reading. "In general, the majority of the damage was done within the first fifteen minutes. Washing nylon tape which has had acid on it is futile. All nylon gear which has had acid on should be discarded, as even the smallest amount of electrolyte can do immense damage. The important thing to note is that very little physical sign of damage was obvious, except for hardening of the web".

Many people ask how strong the tape is and by how much it is weakened when knotted or threaded through a nut. If the basic strength of the tape is say 1,500 Kg then in a sewn sling the maximum theoretical breaking load should be approximately twice that, i.e. 3,000 Kg. However, sewn slings usually fail at about 2,800 Kg. By comparison, knotting will reduce the theoretical sling strength by around 50% i.e. back to the basic strength of the tape. Similarly, threading the tape through nuts will reduce the sling strength by up to 50%, depending on the radius over which the tape passes. (This will alter the degree of deformation caused by the tape when under load).

The way in which the tape is used on wire slings is crucial. Many people use the Lark's foot system shown in Fig. 4. Tests have shown repeatedly that using this method, a strength loss of 75-80% is common. If the tape is doubled around the wire this is reduced to about 50%, even so a

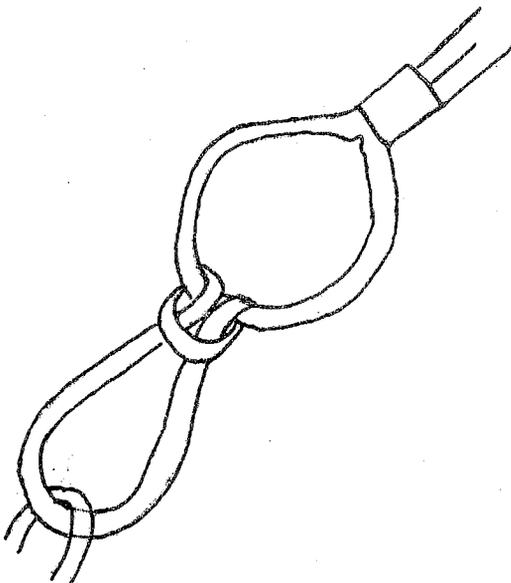


Fig.4. Lark's foot on a wire sling.

considerable loss and a karabiner link is the best way. This also applies to tapes and ropes around trees or spikes. Sharp edges give strength loss of up to 85% for a single band of tape (knotted) and up to 75% for a doubled band (sewn).

Next consider the effect of sunlight. In tests using the equivalent of 300 hours of summer sun (about 2 good summer seasons) undyed tape lost only 0.5% of its strength. Dyed tape lost 4% and, most alarmingly, tapes dyed with a fluorescent dye lost 66% of their strength. This will also apply to ropes, unless a U.V. inhibitor is included and these tend to wear off.

Taking the above factors together, water (up to 20%), abrasion (10% up to 20%) and sunlight (300 hours - 4% or more) plus the condition of use, threading, karabiner shape and knotting or sewing, all amount to a large loss of ultimate strength on all but the newest tapes used in ideal conditions. It is even doubtful if some new tapes would hold a fall factor 2 load. However, before despair causes you to cast away your gear, it should be realised that a fall factor 2 situation is fairly rare. It represents the worst loading possible. Further more, if such as Troll Super or Troll Super-Tube tape is used then the chances of failure are greatly reduced. Both these tapes are extremely strong and have been designed to cope with factors discussed above. Tapes of a lower strength than these are potentially lethal, especially the 15 mm tape often seen in a Lark's foot over a wire sling. Overall, tape has the highest breaking load per unit of thickness and weight in comparison to rope.

In general if you ever have an equipment failure, then return the item to the retailer or direct to the manufacturer. If there is still no help forthcoming, then consult the Technical Committee of the BMC. They will be able to advise you on the problem and may help to obtain some satisfaction. The above does of course only apply if you have not abused the gear.

J. DUNSTER

FOOTSTEPS IN THE SNOW

JANUARY 1977

*'Twilight on the frozen lake,
A North wind about to break,
And footsteps in the snow
And silence down below.'*

Dylan

Consciousness returns slowly with the dull nagging ache of New Year's Day, alcohol induced brain damage and the stiffness of the previous days' exertions. Search for my torch in the squalor at the head of the tent - nearly 4.00pm. Crawl to the door, still in sleeping bag and discover the sun is shining. Search again, this time for the matches. The primus is typically reluctant and half a box of 'swan' and a frayed temper sees it spluttering into some semblance of order. The two foot yellow holocaust gently subsides into a comforting blue roar and soon a steaming mug of coffee, a cigarette and a nagging headache are belatedly greeting the new day.

Glencoe is not reputed to be a good centre for winter climbing this early in the year. In normal years there isn't enough snow, but typically this one is different and there is too much of the damned stuff. The previous day's attempt at the Aonach Egach saw us floundering up the southern slopes of Sgor nam Fiannaidh in knee deep, (occasionally waist deep) powder, emerging below the summit in wind-wipped conditions reminiscent of newsreels of the South col on a bad day. Struggling to stay upright and blinded by spindrift we had no qualms in turning sharp left for the col, the valley and a lunchtime malt in the Clachaig.

That night, in the Pub, Martin pointed out the three quarters full moon and surmised that the wind would have blown much of the loose stuff away. More pints of Guinness firmly entrenched the idea in our minds and we set off at mid-night burdened by huge sacks and intentions of getting up to the start of the ridge and bivvying. At 3.00am we were ground to a halt by the combined pressure of ridiculously heavy sacks, tiredness, improved but

still poor snow conditions and returning sobriety. We were back in the tents for 5.00am.

I'm struggling with a relapsed primus and contemplating the wonder of how Martin managed to get up at 9.00am to go skiing when Pete, Jim and Sally bounce in looking happy. Its obvious what they have done and I pump them for details of the route and conditions. Within a few minutes the seeds of an idea are conceived and germinated over another brew, coming to fruition, thirty minutes later in a haste of rucksack packing and gear sorting. Some nuts and a Mara bar from Jim and off into the gathering dusk at 5.15pm.

The moon is already high and still rising. It's light in the west above the cold, grey wastes of Loch Leven and the dying sun highlights scattered innocuous looking black clouds. Puffing and panting settles into a steady rhythm and pick the way up the steep, broken slopes of the right of Clachaig Gully. Gaining height quickly, the grass and earth is seen to have a feathery white dusting. Soon the heather is starting to struggle under a white blanket and I'm crunching a satisfying trail in half consolidated snow, moving well and wondering if this is going to be third time lucky. A quick stop to put on crampons and then back to the rhythm of movement, weaving round shadowy rock outcrops and up glimmering snow ramps, trying all the time to keep to the ridges where the wind will have stripped off the recently fallen powder. Occasionally floundering in knee-deep sugar, rhythm broken and gasping, making a bee-line for the nearest rock outcrop. Easy scrambling and snow-slope plodding, sliding past larger outcrops, climbing the smaller ones, until the angle drops back and leads to the plateau below the summit. A little voice in my head appeals for time out and a hastily taken cigarette and handful of nuts gives time to contemplate the weather. The black clouds are still floating across but don't appear to be harbouring any hostilities. So its up and off again, across the top of the Sgor and onto the ridge.

The ridge here is a wide saddle, sloping slightly downhill, a veritable 'yellow brick road' of tracks leading off into the distance across to the

next summit. The snow is in remarkably good condition and progress is easy which allows time to relish the view across the valley of the three sisters and Bidean. To the north, the Ben is an iridescent white in the moonlight, whilst the snow in front breaks up and throws back the moon in a myriad of crystal points of light that at times seem to be floating miles above the surface of the ground. A sharp, short shadow trots along faithfully at my heels and all the while the great white disc above, breath streaming in the cold still evening air.

Arriving breathlessly at the next summit and then down again, the ridge narrowing and steepening, its distant profile attaining a jagged outline as the pinnacles come into view. The whole mood changes key and tempo. The jaunty singing becomes overwhelmed in a concentration of route finding and calculated movements. Mind attuned to the nuisance of axe and crampons placements, edging down sharp ridges, turning gendarmes, climbing little steps and all the time keeping a part of the brain open and aware of the subtlety of the route as the tenuous line of steps weaves and dips along the easiest line.

As if to reflect the change of mood a cloud obscures the moon and the darkness is gratefully accepted for a couple of minutes rest. Light returns as quickly as it went and progress continues. Still keeping the steady rhythm going, no time consuming rope work or hold ups from other parties. Just the glow of well being that comes from the smooth flow of uninterrupted mind consuming climbing. Even that bubble is pricked, as the top of one of the pinnacles reveals a steep descent down a chimney on the shady, north side of the ridge. Three attempts result in a jammed rucksack each time, until a rethink provides the solution in the form of an exposed step out left. A step down, a bridge back into the chimney and then steep unstable snow leading down and left, back to the ridge. Kicking huge buckets and feeling the pull of the floor of the Corrie behind and below.

The next tower, ice-cream snow encrusted, looks as big as Cerro Torre and just as mean, but the trick of the light disperses as a regained sense of scale telescopes its size to a much more friendly 30 feet. Good snow takes points and pick well and leads steeply to the top and a vista of the ridge opening out again, a broad slope leading up onto Meall Dearg. The

moon vanishes behind another cloud but the route is straightforward and straight ahead over the summit and on to Am Bodach. Revelling in the magic of the situation again, the warm glow of knowing its in the bag only tempered by the growing leaden feeling in my legs. The last few yards of ascent and then sink gratefully onto the snow, eating the last of the nuts and drinking the last of the view, back along the length of the ridge.

A final look around and then down the easy snow slopes to the distant shadows of the silent valley, a steady canter round outcrops, following and losing tracks and a last halt to remove crampons. A car goes past as I am 20 yards from the road and I make my way to where its just been and wait for thirty long minutes for another of its kind to appear. Eventually one does and responds to the pleas of my outstretched thumb. I drop off at the tent by the Clachaig. Its 11.05pm and the Pub shut five minutes ago. One last glance up at the still moonlit ridge and then into the tent and sleeping bag to contemplate on magic dreams of New Year's Day and moon and snow and happiness. But not for long; within five minutes I'm asleep.

R. SEDGWICK

PROFILE

There is a man who climbs with me (which makes him old as you can see)
His hair is silvered now but thick, how does he do it? That's the trick.
And now we really get to blows, what can I say about the nose?
A lump of putty? idly placed? Leonardo da Vinci was so graced!
It seems to fit the rest somehow; the smiling lips, the craggy brow.
The spatulate hands, brown spotted too, testimony bear, as well you knew
To manual labour done outdoors and jamming slips on northern moors.
His climbing feats they spurred us on, Oh, shall we miss him when he's gone...?

It seems to me that I must find the memories of an earlier kind.
Of times when grey-haired he was not, but boundless energy his lot.
Reflected Glory's not that strong - I suffer from it all along!!
But this a man who should not need the doubtful crutch of others' deed;
He's done enough in his own right, to keep him happy thro' the night.

Joe Browns' old second he was then (we know they climbed upon the Ben).
Apprenticed to 'The Barons' Ways' our lad was seen, in tongue-jut daze
To scale the mighty Cloggy face, and, long before Today's Chalk Race,
Llithrigg, the Corner - done in pain, in socks, not boots, to beat the rain!
A 'climbing plumber' was the name, mixing with Oxbridge types, a game.
Helping with Byne the moors to free; charting the crags for you and me.
Cold Nevis then, and to the plight of wrenched-out tendons and the fight
For fitness; once again all brought, by motor cycle, down to nought.
(An aching ankle, with that cropper, is now assuaged with band of copper!).

The exploits of the Famous Few, are all well known to me and you,
But mark it well, he had the sense, to keep records, without pretence,
Of climbs achieved, with whom and where - Our Lad he had a certain flair.
Without that flair, we would not see, what exploits shaped Our destiny.
Without the memory of our scribe, No "Hard Years" book would come alive;
Nor Willans' helpful piece of prose, get further than its birth-pang throes.
With writers of the Climbing Scene, some acrimony there has been.
They had to rely upon him too - Wilson, Nun, Lewis, Peter Crew!

And earlier still, in days of yore, Valkyrie rules and knew the score,
Of local climbers - I was one, who joined and had the useful fun
Of opening up those gritstone crags, Clad in old plimsols, flannel bags.
Our subject too, he used to force us, Up Black Slab and other courses
Of several other things more savage; walking from Fox-House up to Stannage!
Brown, Cowan, Jones and Handley too, they went on bikes and made his brew!
Then sunlit days when, heads held high, the Rock and Ice would touch the sky.
Our subjects with 'em, on his day, leading a rope for Dennis Grey;
Giving the knowledge and the lore, to Speedy, Midge and many more.

Now wider yet, as thought I sever; the Alpine Club of then would never
Sully its ranks with a 'Worker Bee' so he came, at first to the A.C.G.
And, having worked for them a spell, he was 'retired' and thus the knell
Was tolled. Then using all the wiles, and contacts known, and many smiles
The Alpine Club at last was gained, the dizzy heights of power attained;
Committee Member, Alpine Club - the man was right there at the hub!
His voice was heard, though fair to say, he picked up more than he gave away!!

Story embellishment, this we know, helps the mythology to grow.
But who can quibble with the man, whose rendered "stories" sometimes can
Make you feel, with wondering air, "Am I sure that I was there.....?"
And, graphic exploits, simply told, become the tit-bits, blocks of gold.
That anchorage within us find, then serve to exercise the mind.

So now I go, there's much unsaid, but did you want to hear instead
His failings, sadness, loss, or fear? The games he played, the love of beer?
The little things that spoil him too? In that respect, HE could be YOU...
No, I prefer the lighter vein, the things he's done in our domain;
The climbing world, the Oread scene, the C.C. too, the close friends skein.
A CHARACTER - that sums it best, a thorny one with forceful zest.
He likes his own way, there's no doubt. Stand up to him and you are out!
At least, until next time, that is, when outlooks coincide with his.....!!

